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# Physical Education/Activity for Troubled Youth at an Adolescent Treatment Center: An Interpretive Case Study

by

Joan Marie Halas

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Physical Education/Activity for Troubled Youth at an Adolescent Treatment Center: An Interpretive Case Study submitted by Joan Marie Halas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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For Kenny

## ABSTRACT

An increasing number of Canadian children and youth from diverse backgrounds have been exposed to the marginalizing effects of poverty, racism, child abuse and neglect. As a consequence, many of these young people are growing up angry, disillusioned, and in despair; their problems often manifest through behaviors (e.g., alcohol and substance abuse, involvement in criminal offences) that bring them into conflict with the dominant whitestream Canadian society. These struggles are particularly difficult for Native children and youth whose families and communities are further challenged to overcome years of enforced dependency upon oppressive Canadian governments. In the present system, all children and youth of minority age whose home lives are chaotic and unsafe may become wards of the province. Consequently, some are sent to adolescent treatment centers/schools where their individual behaviors can be "treated"/normalized through such habilitative interventions as counseling, therapy, and modified educational programs. This interpretive case study involved one such treatment center/school that used active living/physical education as a means to help students re-connect positively with a school environment. By using a variety of fictional writing techniques in a mixed genre format, a series of stories and emergent themes are strung together to construct an interpretive portrait of how this physical activity program works and how it helps. Interviews, observations, document and discourse analyses were used as part of the bricolage that comprised the research methods. The result is a postmodern text that provides a rich description of the culture of the gymnasium environment where traditional curricular objectives were often adapted/subverted as students of all ability

levels were encouraged to be "playful", to participate safely, and to have fun. By situating the reader in the context of this cross-cultural treatment center/school, and the experiences lived there, and graying the boundaries between literature and science, this dissertation hopes to challenge conventional notions of scholarly research, traditional pedagogy, and the treatment of troubled youth, and in particular troubled Native youth in Canadian society.

## PREFACE

This dissertation, written as interpretive inquiry, is presented as a collection of ideas surrounding the experience of physical activity at an adolescent treatment center/school. Each chapter attempts to represent a different set of ideas pertaining to the whole of the study, and together, these sets of ideas (i.e., chapters) constitute what the University of Alberta defines as a Mixed Format thesis. A Mixed Format thesis blends published and as-yet-unpublished research, as such, each chapter has been prepared as a self-contained paper, the style of which varies according to the ideas being presented and the targeted academic journal. An advantage to this method of presentation is that the dissemination of the thesis research is promoted/facilitated; a disadvantage for the reader is that a certain amount of repetition is unavoidable between papers (e.g., the context of the study must be re-presented in each chapter/paper). Where possible I have attempted to avoid this repetition yet provide adequate details to support the position of each paper.

I use the term 'treatment center/school' to represent the relations between the two institutions. Although the treatment center and school are located side-by-side and provide interconnected services to the same group of students, each institution is organized independently with a separate staff and administrative structure. The treatment center is a not-for-profit organization accountable to a board of directors. The school is part of the local public school system and accountable to the school division's board of trustees. Where possible, the two institutions share services. For example, the school division provides educational services to the residential clients living at the treatment facility. The treatment center reciprocates by offering a "day

treatment" program for students who are experiencing difficulty within the school division. These "day students" live in the community (with their own families, foster families, or in group homes) yet access treatment center programs as part of their school day. Where appropriate in the discussion to follow, I will use the terms 'treatment center' and 'school' independent of each other as a means to more accurately reflect which institution or program is being described.

I have chosen the words "troubled youth" as a descriptor of all the students attending the treatment center and school. As mentioned in the abstract, this is a story about all Canadian children and youth who are exposed to the marginalizing effects of poverty, racism, child abuse and neglect. The troubled youth attending the treatment center have diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds that include whitestream children and youth; however, the majority of the young people currently in attendance are Native. The cultural landscape of troubled youth in Canada involves an over-representation of Native children and youth. In order to better understand how this over-representation of Native youth has come to be, I attempt to address some of the socio-historical effects of government oppression (e.g., the residential schools) on Native peoples in Canada. I do not, however, deal with the Native children's cultural backgrounds or take up issues of difference and how culture and race are negotiated at the treatment center/school. Rather, this is a study of the culture of the gymnasium and school as opposed to a story about "Native culture" or children living in poverty. Given the high percentage of Native students who participated in this study (17 Native, 5 whitestream), I do try to contextualize the discussion by using examples of how Native students might experience the treatment center/school programs. As with

other interpretive works, this is really a story about me (and other whitestream teachers) and how we interact with and interpret our interactions given our highly privileged positions as individuals working with highly marginalized and troubled youngsters.

Cross-cultural representation is problematic and an issue I struggled with throughout the writing of this text. In fact, my biggest concern entering into the defense of this thesis was that I had somehow reproduced 'racism' through my representation of the young people in this study. Sure enough, my examining committee pointed to areas throughout the text that needed to be written in a more culturally-sensitive way. I appreciated their comments tremendously and have tried to revise the text in a way that more respectfully acknowledges issues of difference within a dominant whitestream culture. I invite the reader to continue this process in their own way as they read through the words and images presented here. For my part, I will take what I have learnt and try to be more culturally-sensitive in my future actions and words.

I would also like to highlight that not all of the whitestream and Native youth in this study live in poverty; poverty does however have marginalizing effects, and I address these from time to time throughout the text. Other areas I could have discussed but chose not to include issues of gender. I acknowledge that gender is an important issue within physical activity contexts (see chapter five for a brief discussion of gender issues that have been presented in recent scholarly works), and I agree that the gendered images presented in this study provide an important context for interpretation. I do hope to engage more critically with issues of gender, race, and

culture in my future efforts to investigate culturally relevant physical education curricula for troubled youth.

Throughout the text I use the words active living, physical education, and physical activity to represent different aspects of the school program. Active living is a concept that in Canadian terms refers to a way of life in which physical activity is valued and integrated into daily life. Active living at the school should be read similarly; teachers have written active living into the school's mission statement and the school timetable provides daily 'active living' opportunities that include regular physical education classes and physical activity option classes. In addition to the scheduled activities, classroom teachers often provide their students with physical activity breaks throughout the school day.

The physical education class is the primary vehicle by which the majority of students participate actively during the school day. For this reason, a large part of the interpretive analysis to follow focuses upon physical education and how it is delivered at the school. Physical activity option classes are supplementary to the physical education program. In the chapters to follow, I use the words physical education, physical activity, play, games, sports, basketball and so forth as more precise descriptors of the activities that are experienced as part of the school's active living program. Dependent upon the context or purpose of each chapter, I sometimes use all of these descriptors interchangeably.

The first chapter presents an interpretation of my own experiences lived during two years of teaching physical education at the adolescent treatment center/school that serves as the focal point for this research story. In chapter two, I attempt to identify

and position myself within some of the tensions that accompany cross-cultural work with oppressed children and youth in treatment centers and schools. In order to do this, I locate examples of how cycles of oppression are sustained through discourse and discursive practices. Chapter three follows up on this notion of tension. In what I refer to as a documentary narrative, I employ a partial discourse analysis mixed with story-telling to construct an impressionist tale of how teachers and staff negotiate the daily tensions that are played out at the treatment center/school.

In chapter four, I experiment with various writing techniques that play with alternative modes of representation, punctuation, and style as a means to more closely represent the culture of the treatment center. In order to show how life often unfolds in unpredictable patterns that follow few rules, I reconfigure aspects of my field notes and interview transcripts into a series of 24 short vignettes to create a running narrative that zooms into and out of the various lives lived at the school. Although some readers may find this text less accessible, to achieve this kind of reaction is partially my intent.

In chapters five and six, the text zeroes in on life in the gym as experienced by the students primarily through their daily physical education classes. Although other aspects of the active living program are also included in these two chapters (e.g., pick-up basketball at lunchtime), I hope to show how a large part of the gymnasium culture is carefully crafted through the philosophy and structure of the physical education class. These chapters address two basic issues: how the physical education program works and how it helps. Although we can never know what another person experiences, the interpretations that are constructed in these chapters are presented as

one attempt to understand the culture of the school and gymnasium and how the active living program provides opportunities for troubled youth to experience school differently.

Chapter five opens with a detailed description illustrating the first fifteen minutes of a physical education class at the school followed by a more traditional 'review of literature'. I return to a more traditional format in order to more effectively summarize what the research has to say about physical education climates. In chapter six, I focus upon particular aspects of the holistic physical activity experience as it relates to the cultural landscape of the young people's lives. The interconnectivity of these two chapters is such that, without the first, the second could not have been written. And without the second, the first would be incomplete.

The final or concluding chapter is not a conclusion at all. It is merely a summing up, a chance to catch a breath before looking ahead to where this research may lead to in terms of follow-up action. For a more complete summary of the research interpretations, see Appendix A, Executive Summary. I have prepared this point-form description of the Active Living program as a sample policy document, one that could be read in a five-minute time frame. The remaining appendices include details of the methods used that were not provided in the previous chapters.

John Dewey once said that a given vocabulary works better than another for a given purpose; as such, one reason for mixing the representational styles in this body of work was to play with the different limitations and possibilities of the written word. I understand that the effectiveness of the text remains open to the interpretation of each reader and each reading.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to respectfully acknowledge and thank all the young people and colleagues at the treatment center/school whose lives crossed my path both when I was a teacher and now as a researcher. Thanks for taking the time to talk with me, to share your impressions with regard to the questions I raised, and to question me with regard to my conceptions of what a relevant curriculum might look like. For many of my former students, those questions came in the form of active resistance to what we were doing at the school. Although it may be a few years later, I am still learning from you, and for that, again, I say thanks.

The process of completing this research project has been both challenging and enjoyable. To that end, I would like to express my appreciation to all those who have contributed to my intellectual and professional development. Thank you to my supervisory and examining committee, and in particular Jane Watkinson, Debra Shogan, and Julia Ellis for shaping the way I think and do research. Thank you to the academic and administrative staff members of the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation who have supported my work as a graduate student. Thank you to my various colleagues/friends at the University of Alberta who challenged my thinking and ways of seeing the world, and in particular, thank you to my Remedy friends for helping make a PhD what it should be … stimulating, supportive, and fun.

I would also like to thank my family for introducing me, at a young age, to issues of social justice in a world that isn't a fair place for everyone. Thank you also to Bob Campbell, without whom I would not have completed this work.

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# CHAPTER 1

## "Runners in the Gym": Tales of Resistance and Conversion at an Adolescent Treatment Center[1]

### *Of Course, This Story Will be Different*

It was a hot, sunny August afternoon, and I took my time walking out to the field for a lunch hour cross-country practice. In three hours, I would be able to say that I had survived my first week back teaching after a two and a half-year break. As I looked around at my new surroundings, I could imagine the voices of my former colleagues, no doubt chuckling at my predicament: *relegated* to the minor leagues of the school division as payment for subverting the system. Twice before I had resigned my teaching position in search of fresh horizons. Twice I would negotiate a return, each time motivated by a desire to re-connect with young people. This time was different. Perhaps people would think I had got my due; offered a one third time contract to work at *"that"* school with *"those kids"* who no one else wanted or could handle. Except that I had wanted to work at *this* school with *these* kids. And I was *without* mortgage, one third time would fit me well.

In the years I spent away from teaching, I had tried to experience a more balanced life. I changed the way I ate, slept, worked and played. I contemplated life and how I wanted to live mine. At some point, I recognized that in my heart I was a physical educator, and that teaching physical education was still a fantastic way for me to work and play at the same time. Years before I had chosen my profession because I believed that it was holistic; body, mind, spirit all wrapped up in one interconnected,

experiential blend of movement and emotion. Physical activities are *sensual*, I thought; kids *feel* what it's like to score a goal or miss a pass, expand their lungs in a run or stretch their limits in a race. When participating in the gym, students actively engage with their environment,[2] and through these interactions, however positive or negative, their subjectivities are affected. It is in this experiential sense of self that I believe the spirit is connected. While other physical educators were boasting that "we" (physical educators) were unique because *we* were the only subject to deal with the physical, I would side with those who said that the power of physical education came from the interdependence of the whole; i.e., "we" teach persons, not skills.

As physical educators, I was beginning to think that "we" had marginalized ourselves by enacting a pedagogy predicated upon the Cartesian mind / body split, one that imposed a curriculum of motor development and physical fitness, with little emphasis on anything else. I agreed with Gallahue, who suggested that "only when educators in general, and school boards in particular, recognize and respect the fact that *children* are multifaceted individuals, with a wide range of backgrounds, and that becoming physically educated involves complex interaction of the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains will physical education take its place in North American schools as a legitimate and respected force in the total school curriculum" (p. 5, 1996). Now that I had found the courage to adopt personal lifestyle changes that would allow greater balance of my own body, mind and spirit, I wondered how this philosophy would translate into my work with "those" kids, the ones with emotional and behavioral *dis*-orders.[3] My one-third time at their school meant that students would receive physical education in four out of every thirty-six classes. Given that the

school did not offer an extra curricular program (in my interview for the job, I had been informed that three hours with *those* kids in the gym would be enough, for *me*), providing students with an opportunity to grow in body, mind, and spirit was going to involve a certain creativity.

In the months leading up to that first week of school, I prepared over and over for what I perceived would be the unique challenges of the students at *that* school. I ran for miles, lost in images of which programs to adopt, what problems to expect. I visited the library to read up on the latest interventions for youth at risk. All the anticipation often left a ball of anxiety in my stomach, a nervous sensation that would dissipate only with action. I was scared, but I was also excited. The feeling in my stomach was like that feeling before a big game; a discomfort, but somehow good for you. My own concentrated pit of readiness. On that hot Friday afternoon before the long weekend, I organized a practice, and waited for the games to begin.

The first student to arrive was Calvin (all names and identifying characteristics have been changed). I had kicked Calvin out of class the day before, so I was pleasantly surprised to see him opting to join my practice. Soon after, a group formed. I could feel my pulse rising with the arrival of each new student. Jenny, Jane and Melissa were also there. Were they meeting me, or waiting for someone else? These girls did not look like runners, which was just another curiosity in this first week of school. The five others had arrived as a boisterous blur. There were just too many new faces and names. I asked each one to sign my clip board, and like a billiard player set to rack her nine pool balls, I collected them all into a small circle and explained what the cross country team was all about. We warmed up our muscles, and

I quietly suggested that we do one easy lap around the field, each person at their own pace.

The boys were the first to stand up, and one by one, they kicked out into a jog, forming a staggered column stretching slowly down one side of the grassy field. I chose to stay back with the girls. I thought it was fantastic that they were out for a run, and I told them so. I was elated. Our physical education classes that first week left much to be desired, and I was sure that I had not made a very good impression on anyone. Of the three separate groups I taught, each had its own problems. Students had ignored me, refused my instructions, wandered off aimlessly during class, made fun of me and were openly hostile to me and some of their classmates. Nonetheless, I tried to work with whatever each class presented. I had chosen what I had hoped would be easy, non-threatening activities; e.g., juggling scarves (in the wind?) and orienteering (an easy, scavenger-hunt version). When Joey had signed his orienteering form with the words *fuck this shit*, I simply gave him a new sheet of paper and asked him to sign his name again. Unfortunately, there had been more than a few Joey's, and I ended up sending a few of those students back to their locked residence from each class. It had been a rough start, but not unusual, I was told.

As the girls and I set off for our first lap around the large, open grounds that were bordered by a wooded forest of evergreens and domestic gardens, I felt hopeful for the first time. If these girls felt comfortable enough to want to join my running practice, then my first week must had made some kind of an impression. By the time we turned the last corner on the field, the others were waiting, and I ran ahead to organize the boys before I lost them to their own boredom or bullying. Once again

gathered as a group, we decided to do another lap. Again, bodies spread out in single file, tracing a crooked line around an unsure oval. As I watched the boys break into a jog, I thought it might be a good idea to run ahead and "bond" with Calvin, who had told me to fuck off the day before. Not wanting to waste this opportunity, I turned to the girls and mentioned that I better run ahead with the boys for awhile. They smiled and waved me on. I caught up to Calvin and cautiously entered a conversation with him - about running. I asked him if he liked running ("cause you look like a runner"), what activities he had done in the past, and talked a bit about the running club I was hoping to organize. In two weeks, those who wished could enter a division cross-country race. I said I would take anyone who comes to the lunch hour practices, and that the races were fun, and might give them a break from the treatment center. I was trying to connect. While I had hoped for mono-syllabic responses at the least, Calvin was friendly enough and less hostile than expected. Perhaps I had won another mini-battle. Maybe our class would be better this afternoon. As we reached the three-quarter mark of the second lap, I sighed and thought, this just might work. At that point, I looked back over my shoulder to throw the girls an encouraging glance.

Immediately, my heart sank, a sour rush of adrenaline fouling the empty pit of my stomach. The girls were nowhere to be seen. I quickly looked ahead and started to count: one, two, three four, five, Calvin makes six… That concentrated pit of readiness disintegrated as I realized the girls had tricked me. I stopped in my tracks. Calvin stopped too, and realizing what had happened, barked his glee at my predicament with a "you-loser" vernacular. I could have done nothing better to endear

myself to him. If you're going to bond, why not let him see your weakest side, the one that returns to the principal to say, "I lost three students during practice".

Surprisingly, and to my relief, if I had made a mistake no one seemed to panic. When I informed the school what had happened, it was generally agreed that I had been set up for this to occur. It was a Friday, before the Labor Day long weekend, the weather was good, and the successful turnout meant I had too many students to supervise on my own. The girls were known to be runners, but not the kind I had known. They lived in the locked units at the treatment center, and should not have been let out for the afternoon practice without extra *eyes* to closely supervise them. By the start of first class that afternoon, I was told to forget about the incident. Apparently, kids going on the run was part of the culture of the place. Organizing a lunch hour practice was not.

Despite the assurances that it was normal for kids to take off, escape, go *AWOL* from the treatment center, I couldn't stop thinking about those three girls. Where would they stay? What would they eat? Who would they link up with? They were children, barely 12 years old. How would they survive in an urban center that preyed on young girls, where child prostitution was an accepted cornerstone of the downtown economy, and gang rape was a dangerous possibility? How could I not worry about them? With a quick glance over my shoulder, everything I knew to be true about the teaching of physical education was itself subverted. Abruptly, *those* kids at *that* school, in a defiant show of resistance, would force on me an intensive search for new ways of doing. If physical education was going to meet their needs, something had to give, and I knew the giving would necessarily start with me. On that

Friday afternoon, I began what Brown (1998) refers to as the practitioner's "conversion" experience in the pedagogy of the oppressed.[4]

***Converting the Balance of Power in the "Contact Zone"***

In retrospect I recall noticing a change around the third week in October, some seven weeks after that first Friday. This moment stands out because a colleague working at the treatment center sat across from me in the staff room and asked what I was doing in the gym that made kids want to be there. His question made me stop and think: did my students really like coming to class? I was certainly not sending as many students back as I used to. There were the few who persisted in bringing their own brand of hostility to the *contact zone*[5] (Brown, 1998), which in this case occurred in my class with the interactions between myself, my teaching colleague (a teacher's assistant), and our students. But the conflicts, although not disappearing, had certainly become more localized to certain relationships with particular students.

The most obvious innovation had taken place in the first few weeks of school. Out of a respect for *"how things were always done"*, I had continued the previous teacher's class management structure, whereby each class would begin upstairs in the library. We would gather all students together, make them wait while we checked off their attendance and gym attire on individual student record sheets, tell them what was going to happen in class that day, send students who had not brought their gym clothes back to the residence, and then walk those that had down the stairs to the change room, make them wait as a group until the last student straggled out of the tiny, closet-like box of a washroom in their gym clothes, walk them into the gym, and sit them down for a warm-up.

It was a structure of control predicated on a relationship of distrust, and the students met our expectations with glowing remarks of "fuck you" "this sucks" and "why are you picking on me?" One by one students were sent back to the residence for poking and provoking, most dissenters evicted in the first 10 minutes of class before they had even made it to the gym. I couldn't stand the tension, and in my own first act of resistance, we changed the attendance procedure, thus reducing the students' opportunities to fail. A year later, we changed the procedure altogether; students were now allowed to go directly from their class to the gym, and each class would start after a 5-15 minute period of free time. A simple evolution of rules and the number of students *mis*-behaving at the start of class decreased significantly.

Conflicts did still occur, however, and when I was involved, I would make the first move to ask what I could do to make the situation better. In each case I made the deliberate effort to ask the "offending" student what I might have done to cause the offence and what I might do to help prevent it happening again. The results varied. When Darryl persisted in goofing off and subverting the group activity, I would calmly give in and ask him to leave. He would calmly pick up his skateboard, and in an act of resigned compliance head back to the lock up. After a month of this daily ritual, I stopped him in the parking lot one day and asked him what I could do to keep from kicking him out of class. He didn't like phys. ed., he said, and why couldn't he just skateboard every class? Although I explained that we could not possibly give in to every student's personal likes and dislikes[6], we did try to negotiate a compromise. It was a *postmodern détente* with the tension between us proportioned out, that is, we found a way to disagree with less acrimony. His goofiness took on less of an edge

toward me, and I sent him back less often. In this case, it wasn't a clear- cut settlement, but boundaries between us became more flexible, allowing us to share time and space together a little better.

With others the conversations produced more promising outcomes. One afternoon, I sent Lisa back for walking into the boys' change room while the boys were changing. Her response was to call me a "fuck'n' c..." over and over again as loud as she could as she deliberately wound her way back through the entire school en route to her residence. My response was to meet her in her room after school with the opening line: "you're mad at me, eh?"[7] She agreed and then described for me which chair she had broken in the center, which staff members she had verbally accosted in the process. We talked about what had happened. She understood that the privacy of change rooms should be respected, but thought it was unfair that I sent her back without giving her a warning. "You give other people warnings." She had a point. I explained that some cases, like protecting the privacy of young people who may be dealing with issues of sexual abuse, necessitated that I skip the warning and go right to the consequence. It still wasn't fair, she said, but at least we were talking about it. Lisa apologized for swearing at me, and I apologized for not being more clear about the rules. The next day she was back in class as if nothing had happened. Our relationship was intact, and I explained more clearly to each class that any potential voyeurs better stay far away from the change room doors. To my relief, I was also learning how the young people at my school never seemed to hold a grudge, an unusual and highly utilitarian quality that I had rarely experienced in all my previous contact with adolescents.

***Interpreting the Phenomenon of Lived Experience***

I include these stories because they describe my own lived-through experience (van Manen, 1997) as a negotiator of change[8] in the school. The process of transforming the phenomenon of lived experience to text is interpretive, and I construct an interpretation of my own experience here as a full acknowledgement of my own embodiment (Greene, 1994; Heshusius & Ballard, 1996) in the research I am undertaking. van Manen (1997) says that interpretive study "is always the project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence" (p. 30). In my time as a teacher, I was the real person searching for meaning in the experiences I lived with my students in our contact zone. Despite years of teaching in a middle school in the same neighborhood, and a one-year assignment working overseas in a British Comprehensive School, all the successes that had gone before me were like books I had read, assimilated, and forgotten. Been there, done that, fell flat. Designing a physical education program with tools from the traditional curriculum was like using an old, cracked foundation to build a new school. The students at our school forced the imbalance; and to survive I had to craft new teaching implements.

Each student's demonstrative *resistance* to my pedagogy compelled me to reevaluate my ways of being in their world.[9] Like Brown (1998) and Pratt (cited in Brown, 1998), I needed to question the underlying pedagogical assumptions that were guiding my actions and attracting the "unsolicited, oppositional discourse" of my students. I also needed to increase my awareness of the personal, social and historical

influences that were shaping who my students were. van Manen (1997) states that "pedagogy requires a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience (children's realities and lifeworlds)" (p.20); more important than curricular content, I needed to know my students and how their lived experiences affected who they were in my class.

One of the first lessons I learned was that these young people were not the type to be controlled. Worse yet, I could not control them. That was a frightening proposition given the ubiquitously promoted assumption that if you can't control your class in the first week, you'll never control them, (which reads "you are a failure as a teacher"). At the risk of losing favor in the eyes of conventional thought, I began to ask myself pointed questions. For instance, some of my students arrived with ineffable stories of sexual and physical abuse; was it not a good thing that they were presently resisting any efforts by another (particularly an authority figure) to control them?

***The "Peda/logical Conversion" Experience***

On reflection, I believe that I was engaged in what might be called an unsophisticated brand of "*peda*/logical" hermeneutic phenomenology,[10] where the logical pedagogical intervention was for me to "read" (Ellis, 1998) how students presented themselves in my class, and act on my interpretations of what van Manen (1997) calls their "texts" of life (p. 4). The texts were my students' bodies, language, laughter, hostility, clothes, absence or presence in class, their ways of orienting to the experiential demands of my program. To create some form of curriculum that was relevant and nurturing, we needed to find how to interpret the texts they were

presented.[11] Over time I converted from teacher as power broker to teacher as learner, seeing it as my moral duty to deliver a program constructed of an ongoing dialogue centering on their needs:[12] an "alter/native" pedagogy for the oppressed (Brown, 1998) rooted in a survivalist instinct that said, however threatening, "Listen to the message behind the words."

What Brown (1998) referred to as the painful first step in the conversion process proved to be an invaluable remedy; I asked my students what they thought we should do, and trusted their input enough to carry through on what they said. In what is now a cliché, I hoped they would take some ownership for the program. They made up the teams for tournaments and special events; they chose the class activity. As my students opted time and again to play basketball or low organized tag games, I agonized over my noncompliance with the standardized government curriculum. Was I a bad teacher for allowing so much choice? (And then I paraphrase Brown's words: contextualize the curriculum to the environment and games, language and lore, of the group.)

When the school division increased my teaching assignment from one-third to half time, I invited a small group of students for coffee so I could ask them how best to use the extra time.[13] It would be my first time taking students off grounds during the school day, and I was well aware of the risks involved. However, Keen (cited in Anglin, 1996) states that "the chief function of the teacher is to give students permission to allow exiled portions of their personalities to return home and be welcomed" (p.97). As we took our seats at the restaurant table, I wondered how long it would be before my little group of "conduct *dis*-ordered, attention deficit,

operationally defiant juvenile offenders" would do something *bad* in this public setting.

Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I caught sight of my older brother walking toward me. My protective barriers went up, encircling him. How would my students react? Would they make fun of him too, as was the culture of our shared environment? Not surprisingly (for, despite my worry, I believed this to be true), my students were exceptionally polite and welcoming to my own exiled personality, the youngest sister of an older brother. Like my students, I had family: a big brother who teased me. A chance encounter and we all had brothers and sisters, one less differentiating factor between us. My brother left and we went back to the task at hand, the distance between us shortening as I learned another impromptu lesson about how to be as a teacher.

With the students' input, we used the increased physical education time to provide phys. ed. options, flexible opportunities in the school day for selected students to participate in physical activities. If the weather was fair, and other teachers were in agreement, we could schedule a lacrosse game during class time, and give students the option of coming outside or staying in their regularly scheduled class. Once engaged and happy in games and playtime of their choosing, introducing less familiar activity options became a process of gentle persuasion. Folk and social dance would become one of the more memorable activities among others from cross-country skiing to cycling to tai chi to volleyball, track and field, and hockey (to name a few). The only condition for taking part was that kids had to have been "good" in their previous

classes (i.e., not kicked out of any class during the day).[14] The popularity of the option classes suggested that for some being good was worth the effort.

Another "peda/logical" action was the initiation of a variety of school-wide special events, such as the inaugural winter carnival, and Friday afternoon tobogganing. Although the hint of these extra activities was enthusiastically received by students, a few staff members were openly resistant to any proposed change to the regular schedule. An attempted field trip early in the year had been an unqualified disaster and had dramatically confirmed for some teachers their personal expectations that "these kids couldn't handle" anything out of the ordinary. But the idea persisted, and with doggedly meticulous planning (and more than a few nervous moments), the special events began to take place without any serious setbacks. In time teachers and staff who were skeptical became more willing to take risks to improve the programming.

One winter lunch hour we were playing spongee on the ice rink. When I stopped to check the time remaining till afternoon classes began, I realized that about three-quarters of the student population were playing outside on the rink or inside in the gym. I asked a few of the participating staff members if they wanted to extend the lunch hour into period one of the afternoon. Of course they smiled, but could we really do it? I ran back inside the school and asked a few of the support staff what they thought of the idea. The principal wasn't on site, and they were the wise decision-makers. When they said "okay", and that they'd look after the few students who weren't already taking part that lunch hour, we were set. The kids were thrilled, the games carried on, and some 25 minutes later we all returned to class feeling a little

excited that the regular school day was ours and could be converted with one small gesture. Although it wasn't a revolution, we were in some respects, co-conspirators, having managed to extend a lunch hour to keep playing that one day. Was it a small step toward meaningful emancipation in an education system dominated by the punch-in-time-lock world view? Perhaps.

My first year of teaching in *that* school would end with almost as unexpected an event as the sudden disappearance of those three students on that August after-noon 10 months before. In a June staff meeting to plan the following year's timetable, one of the more traditional teachers looked up at the group and quietly offered the comment that "*these* kids need physical education more than anything". She then suggested to the other staff that I should take a blank school timetable home and fill in the physical education schedule for the following year. The others agreed and built their classes around the timetable that I returned. *We* physical educators are not always accustomed to such concrete validations. But *this* school and *those* kids and my colleagues were quite exceptional. Through dialogue and discussion, feedback and follow-up, we, as a group, interpreted the challenges of our school life world in ways that nurtured creativity and empowered risk.

***Creating a "Peda/logical" Active Living and Life Skills Training Program***

In my two years at the school, other teachers added their own flavor to the daily program: a green house was built, weekly student visits to the local seniors' home were organized, camping trips were jointly offered by school and treatment center staff, and soon after, an option period (offering arts and crafts, photography, greenhouse, board games, ice hockey, to name a few) was scheduled into the daily

curriculum. Concurrently, activities such as the woodshop, school field trips, weekly swimming, and lunch hour basketball continued their popularity with students. We named the programs we were implementing active living and life skills training, cultivated to meet the unique needs of the students.

Happily, this school was an exciting place to work, and for a physical education specialist, it was rewarding to feel empowered and appreciated by both the staff and especially the students who were participating actively in most of the programs. The year after I left the school, the curriculum was "peda/logically converted" once more. This time, academic courses were moved to the morning schedule, and other activities, particularly daily physical education, were offered in the afternoon. This re-arrangement of the schedule allowed for an increase in the physical education schedule from once every second day to once daily. With daily physical education supplemented by daily physical activity options in conjunction with daily lunch hour basketball (and other activities), once weekly swimming, special events, and unscheduled activity breaks, the school's active living program offered *those* kids at *that* school lots of opportunity to participate in *our* (i.e., teachers, paraprofessionals, principal, and students) peda/logical interpretation of a relevant curriculum.

***The Conversion Experience: Building a Sequel***

Hot Friday afternoons still came, and kids still went on the run. Some would run in wintertime and others throughout the year. Some would return safely on their own, others in the back seat of a police car; yet others were never seen again. The outside world remains dangerous for young children and youth, especially those who end up at treatment centers such as the one in this story. Young people at risk wear

their vulnerabilities like a beacon, flashing signals that are picked up loud and clear by street gangs, predators, and a society that provides access to alcohol, drugs, and criminal opportunities. Even the most progressive teaching practices cannot override the social and economic conditions and institutional structures that facilitate failure for those disadvantaged by the effects of poverty and discrimination (Dudley-Marling, 1996). One-size-fits-all solutions to educational problems do not exist (Guba, 1996). A school's physical education program is only a portion of the school day, and the school day only a small part of the whole of a child's life.

When Brown (1998) says to contextualize the curriculum to the language, lore, environment and games of the non-dominant subculture, I become more aware of what that implies for working with the young people in this story. I realize now how much more there was to the school's mission statement: enhance the students' "self esteem and personal safety." I had not been prepared for the realization that for some of those kids, a decision to stay in school could be the difference between staying alive or falling by the curbside.

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In a discussion of the reflexive nature of self-narrative, Julia Ellis (1998) suggests that the narrative process is a search for coherence, historical unity, and meaningful integration. "The narrative accounts people generate need to be understood, not as records of what happened, but as current drafts of their own interpretive work of searching for cause-and-effect or making connections among self-relevant events" (p. 42). As I complete this moment of reflection regarding my own experiences in the stories I have told, many questions still beg consideration.

To begin, how should a teacher, particularly a *whitestream* Canadian[15] be toward extremely vulnerable, high-risk young people? And what of the cultural divide that exists between me as a member of the dominant class and my students, many of whom were Aboriginal? Under these conditions, it is critical to adhere to the words of Chrisjohn & Young (1997) who emphatically state that "ahistorical and acontextual" strategies of helping individuals must be expanded to include the "cultural, historical, and economic context in which First Nations continue to struggle" (p. 247). Curricular programs, especially those that are still governed by "assumptions of European superiority," must be resisted (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald, 1997). This, Pewewardy advises, (1998) requires hard work and flexible thinking to change instructional procedures. To resist is to ask fundamental questions. For example, what are the pedagogical imperatives that are assumed to be central to the success of education, and, to what extent are they really ethical (Brown, 1998; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997)?

I have walked with these questions since that first day the girls went on the run. I suggest that the school's physical activity program evolved out of an unsophisticated hermeneutic phenomenological process, a peda/logical conversion enacted as a logical response to the students' "unsolicited oppositional discourse" (Brown, 1998; Pratt, 1991, as cited in Brown). Although these changes in direction brought more kids running to the gym, continued acts of student resistance provide starting points for further inquiry. The knowledge that I have gained from my own past conversion experiences leads me to believe that further attempts to understand the lives of young people requires continued collaboration and the willingness to enter

into their cultural life worlds. I realize more acutely the importance of listening; that is, reflectively attending to feedback from my students, however negative; from my colleagues, however tense; and from my own interpretations, however incomplete.

***A Final Thought on Connecting Narrative Text to Research***

If social inquiry is an emotional and moral undertaking (Schwandt, 1996), so too is the act of teaching. To listen and trust and look for the best in one's students is an act of love, a respectful acknowledgement that in their defiance and resistance to your pedagogy, they probably know more about themselves and what their needs are than you do. Again, it is a question of how to be. Similarly, interpretive researchers should ask "How should I be toward these people I am studying" in order to answer "How shall I know these people that I am studying" (Schwandt, p. 84, 1996).

Although the practice of narrating the ordinary and mundane events of daily life is a contested form of research (Ceglowski, 1997; Sparkes, 1995), I cannot deny the transformative effect, the somatic knowing (Heshusius & Ballard, 1996) I feel in the gut of my stomach that says, to me, "When interacting with youth at risk, no matter how personally vulnerable the act, *ask* them how you can help." Thus there is no ending to this story, only a wish for a "more hopeful beginning for new stories" (Ellis, 1998, p.10).

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[1] A version of this chapter has been published. Halas, J. (1998). Runners in the gym. Tales of resistance and conversion at an adolescent treatment center. Journal of Native Education, 22, (2), 210-222.

[2] Miller (1990) refers to the active engagement of learning through experience as "holistic education", and emphasizes that "education is not the mere acquisition of information, but a joyful, exhilarating and

enriching exploration of the world and one's intricate relationships to it" (p. 157). Speaking from a different perspective, Willie Ermine (1998) says that "experience is knowledge", and points to Aboriginal traditions that are holistic in that they explore the inner space, "that universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self, or the being" (p. 103). Incorporating aspects of these two interpretations, I have come to view physical activity "environments" as interactive, both outwardly (with the external world), and inwardly, with the self (i.e., constituting the spirit).

[3] Many of the students in this story were identified as having severe emotional and behavioral disorders (Coleman, 1996), a categorization that enabled them to attend an adolescent treatment center school. In order to recognize the problematic nature of using socially constructed labels such as these that are predicated on assumptions of normalcy (see Shogan, 1998), I have chosen to represent the word *dis-order* with italics and hyphenation. I will continue this practice throughout the text to trouble the use and interpretation of other words and categories.

[4] Brown (1998) reflects on his own conversion experience, which he described as a self-reflexive process of seeing oneself through the eyes of the oppressed other, that is, the Indigenous student. "Seeing myself, not through my own self-congratulatory eyes, but through the more critical gaze of the Athabascan, comprised the first painful step toward an "alter/native" pedagogy – one oriented less toward the urban centers of the Euro-American culture and more toward the borderlands of the local indigenous subculture" (p. 136). Although many of the students at our school were of Aboriginal descent, all of the young people belonged to a subculture of the oppressed. My own success in implementing a "relevant and nurturing" pedagogy (Brown's terms) would depend upon my own efforts to "contextualize the curriculum of the dominant culture within the history, language, lore, environment, and games of the subculture" (p. 136). In my case, I had much to learn about the subculture of *those* kids. As a starting point, I endeavored to view myself and my physical education program through the eyes of my students.

[5] The contact zone has been described by Pratt (Brown, 1998) as the space where cultures "meet, clash, and grapple" with each other in "highly asymmetrical relations of power", often to the detriment of the less dominant culture. A traditional classroom setting, with teacher as authority over the student, is a variation on this theme.

[6] Choice was limited by space and safety considerations. Whether in the small gym (too many equipment options could lead to potential injury), or on a large field (too many options would be difficult to supervise), the structure of the environment and the nature of the students constrained our efforts to meet individual needs.

[7] Although much was tolerated in terms of student language and behavior at the school, indoctrinating a female staff member into the "*F... C...*" Club was not. I knew that Lisa would have to arrange through the principal to meet with me and apologize before she would be allowed back in the school. After an afternoon of classes, I had forgotten about the incident. When a colleague approached me later that day with a very sympathetic "how are you?" I looked at her a little bewildered. It had been a great day in the gym. Kids were involved, every class went well. "But Lisa", she replied, throwing me a look of support. "Ahhh, ...Lisa. I better go talk to her." Lisa's angry words had bounced off my back so quick that I had forgotten the incident had even occurred. I realized then and there that I had *arrived* at the school.

[8] By *negotiator of change* I refer to my role in enacting change in a variety of contexts, for example, changing the relationship between myself and my students; changing aspects of the physical education class within the school day; changing curriculum; changing attitudes; and so forth.

[9] van Manen (1997), a pedagogical phenomenologist, defines pedagogy as the "activity of teaching, parenting, educating, or generally living with children, that requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations" (p.2). I think that such a definition appropriately essentializes the experiential, performance-oriented nature of teaching as a human interaction, without narrowing the focus to a more pedantic, teacher-centered orientation or dogma.

[10] Social science inquirers refer to this commonsense practice of analyzing one's own actions and the actions of others to arrive at some form of interpretation as "verstehen" (Greene, 1994). People move into this commonsense world from various biographical locations from which experiences are shaped

and reshaped with the help of predecessors and contemporaries (Schutz, Greene, 1994). Social reality originates from this frequently occurring phenomenon carried out by human beings. Although some dismiss the knowledge claims made from such endeavors, the interpretations themselves are worthy of interpretation. What I am saying is, we can learn from experience, and as teachers, it is logical to do so. It is knowledge for a feedback loop.

[11] I knew this, and had even studied ways for a physical education teacher to recognize the meaning of negative feedback in the gym (Halas, 1991). But this was really hard, and I was prepared to give up teaching if I couldn't learn a better way of working with these kids.

[12] I was not the only teacher struggling through peda/logical conversion processes. I would often sit around after school with my colleagues and ruminate on the tensions that were played out in our respective classrooms that day. In a sense this de-briefing was a feedback loop, a shared process of describing and interpreting experience, not unlike the sharing of textual data and construction of emergent themes in hermeneutics (Ellis, 1998). The collaboration allowed us to prepare better for the next day's challenges. A key figure in this collaborative conversion process was the school principal who in many ways tried to disrupt the hierarchy by allowing individuals to enact change, including structural change (e.g., timetables), based on our shared interpretations of what was needed in the school.

[13] Although I had started out as a one-third time physical education teacher, within months, my position was expanded to half time, which was a rarity in an era of education cutbacks and fiscal restraint. The principal had raised the argument that the young people at our school "needed phys. ed.," and the school division seemingly agreed.

[14] I should clarify that my conversion experience still left room for the use of traditional teaching truths, for example, Skinnerian reward and punishment behavior management.

[15] I borrow this term from Denis (1997), who coined *whitestream* to indicate that Canadian society, although principally structured on the European, white experience, is more than a "white" society in socio-demographic, cultural and economic terms.

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## CHAPTER 2

### Reclaiming or reproducing? Pre-tensions and the problematic nature of treatment centers/schools in Canada

***Warning: is it too soon to write epitaph for research project?***

*Who am I trying to kid?* This is the thought that repeats itself over and over as I read and re-read the dozens of drafted manuscripts I have worked through each day for the past six months. I am trying to wrap up the results of a three year long study of the active living program at an adolescent treatment center where I used to work. All that is left to do for me to graduate with a doctorate in philosophy in physical education is to produce a set of APA style articles suitable for publication in refereed journals. Find a format, assimilate your research data into some kind of meaningful exposé that will adequately and respectfully represent the "voices" of the research participants who graciously accommodated your fieldwork needs, and draw conclusions. Straightforward enough. But what if all that you have done, and all that you have learned, tells you that what you are presenting will do little to affect the lives of the young people whom your research was intended to serve?

This study is about troubled youth, who by any other name can mean anything to anyone. To some, they are the "scum" who are reeking havoc in our streets, neighbourhoods, and cities (Sinclair, 1998). To others, they are the "hostile, unattached kids" (Brendtro & Long, 1994) that our society is churning out ever more rapidly as poverty, racism and child abuse, among other inequalities, become the germs from which the dominant classes seek their immunity. As a category, they are

citizens living their minority age in some form of disharmony with society. Although they may sometimes be grouped together in government institutions (e.g., jails, treatment centers, foster homes), the reasons for their inclusion in such programs are complex and not homogenous. The child may be in custodial care due to his or her own behaviors (e.g., substance abuse) or the behaviors of others (e.g., removal from an abusive, neglectful, or dangerous situation in the family).

To me, they are the kids who used to play in my physical education classes when I was a teacher. They are kids who can be funny and mad, sometimes hyper, sometimes hyper-crazy (in a happy, bouncing off the wall kind of way), sometimes *really* mad (in a destructive, scary kind of way), sometimes sad and withdrawn. Always interesting. They have brothers and sisters, favorite colors, foods they loved and hated, and opinions about the world around them. They say things like 'please' and 'thank you', 'what are we doing today?', 'why should I?', 'NO!', 'this sucks' and 'fuck you'. To us (teachers), they could be mere blips in the life of the school; another body-soul to warehouse until the social services' assemblage line calls up their number again. To them, I imagine we were mere blips amongst the myriad of adult caregivers, strangers who exercised temporary power over their lives. Perhaps with us, school could be fun. But at day's end, we went home in our nice cars to our nice homes, and they went *back* to whatever it was, that as troubled youth, they would have to negotiate. Theirs was not a life you would trade for.

These are the kids who so willingly talked to me about their school as part of my interpretive case study. These are also the kids heading toward the "child's crisis", who are so badly "underserved" by physical education scholars and universities who,

regardless of the reasoning, are wanting in their social responsibilities towards children (Lawson, 1998, 1997). Physical education has a unique role to play in the life of youth at risk, say the experts (Martinek, 1997). Yet, these same professionals also admit that "there is little that we, as physical educators, can do to alleviate the multiple external challenges that many of these young people face, such as poverty, high crime neighborhoods, and poor educational opportunities" (Miller, Bredemeier, Shields, 1997, p.114). Physical education that is ahistorical, that ignores the socio-cultural contexts of its students, that does not create new visions of practice to meet the multiple, interdependent needs of poor and vulnerable children, their families, and their local communities, must transform itself (Lawson, 1998). Researchers working with troubled youth must willingly accept ideologies that call for social change (Dulmas & Wodnarski, 1997), and position their work within the knowledge that there is no single cause, no single solution, no one enriching educational program to solve all problems (Miller et al., 1997). Not a very promising outlook from which to construct a research interpretation.

I mention this partially in response to Jane Flax's warning that when speaking in knowledge's voice or on its behalf, "we can avoid taking responsibility for locating our contingent selves as the producers of knowledge and truth claims" (Flax, 1992, p.458). The writing of Flax and other poststructural scholars (see Gore, 1993; Tavares, 1998) pulls me to question the *innocence* by which we, as teachers, scholars, scientists, and philosophers use grand narratives in our desire to change the world and emancipate the oppressed from their suffering. As Flax explains, Western beliefs, rooted in liberal humanist traditions, make connections between truth and knowledge

that are predicated upon assumptions that the social and the physical universe is governed by a set of laws that are uniform, benevolent, and nonconflictual. "A belief in the connections between truth and knowledge at this point in Western history seems far more likely to encourage a dangerously blind innocence rather than to prepare the way for justice and freedom" (Flax, p. 458). To re-phrase Flax, scholarly work is driven not by a search for innocent truth, but by our own desires for power. Assuming that as teachers, we are "incorporated within the world of truth production" (Foucault, cited in Bové, 1995), and that our own contingent selves, forever influenced by temporality, history, and culture, are neither self-transparent nor self sovereign, (Usher & Edwards, 1994), then ethically, investigating the personal desires that fuel our actions and passions must remain on-going and integral aspects of the research process.

I mention this also in response to the tensions that won't go away in my work. These tensions that keep me awake at night and incapable of completing my sentences by day spring from my own culpability; imagine an awful feeling one would get after spending many seasons recovering a beautiful yet endangered species from an environmental disaster, only to realize that, somehow, unbeknownst to you, you had been dumping these thinking/sentient beings right back into the polluted river, upstream. Worse yet, you're the one who's keeping the river polluted. That is, by focusing all your attention on the fish, you never noticed how you were helping to cause the toxic mess in the first place. I hate this feeling, and it is only by "troubling the water" of my own, sometimes *pretentious*[1] humanistic educational beliefs that I may be able to elucidate more honestly the role of this research project in the

development of "relevant and nurturing" curricula for oppressed children. At this time, I see no other way out but to try and negotiate these tensions, or, as I like to call them, 'pre-tensions' through reflexivity, and, dare I say it, 'good intentions'.

The emancipatory narrative that frames my research study tells a "local" story of how a group of whitestream[2] teachers working with a group of 'troubled' youth use active living/physical activity/play as a means to create a meaningful and relevant curriculum for their students. I employ the word "local" as a means to re-claim my humanistic beliefs at a local level: as David Suzuki (1999) recommends, our global hope for a better future needs to be activated along the lines of "think local, act local". The complex nature of our evolving world as it stands at the precipice of the 21st century necessitates this reconfiguration of our social activism. This does not mean that we ignore global issues. Rather, we need to locate the complex and often conflicting layers of discourse impacting upon our work, such that we can more reflectively address the potential effects of discourse within a local context. To that end, I will attempt in the following section to identify some of the more problematic issues affecting troubled youth in Canada, particularly as they apply to the 'local' nature of the research I am undertaking.

**The problematic nature of treatment centers/schools in Canada**

***Who are 'troubled' youth? Native children/Native issues***

As with many "troubled" youth in Canada, the young people in my research study included "unattached"[2] adolescents from all classes and ethnic groups (Tanner, 1996). Yet, contrary to Tanner's studied opinion that there is no racially based underclass in Canada, there were definite racial and class trends at this school.[3] Just

like the over-representation of Native[4] youth in the interconnected justice and social welfare systems (Canada Safety Council, 1996; Nazur Bloom, 1996; Neilsen, 1992; Reid, Tremblay, Pelletier & McKay, 1994), the majority of students at this treatment center were Native. Adolescent treatment centers are specialized facilities that offer individualized, therapeutic interventions for young people who struggle to overcome the effects of such problems as drug and alcohol addictions or physical and sexual abuse. The high ratio of Native to non-Native youth in need of treatment at this center suggests that there is indeed a racially based underclass in this country, and one that needs to be considered as the cultural landscape of troubled youth is defined. Given the size and socio-demographic diversity of the various regions of Canada, I will provide a 'localized' example of the difficulties Native youth face in their daily lives.

In Manitoba, the rate of adolescent suicide for the aboriginal youth population is 6 times the provincial rate, and ten times that of youth in the general population, the rates of family violence and alcoholism are 80% in some aboriginal communities, aboriginal children have a death rate that is 4 times the average in Manitoba, aboriginal people are six times more likely to be incarcerated than non-aboriginal people, and the number of street gang members has increased by 300% from 1994-1997 (Manitoba Children and Youth Secretariat, 1997; Teichroeb, 1997). Currently, Winnipeg has the worst criminal youth gang problem in Canada, with estimates of 600 to 1,000 members (mostly aboriginal) and the highest street gang related homicide rate in the country (MacDonald, 1998). Native incarceration rates in Manitoba reach as high as 60% (Jackson, cited in Nielsen, 1992). Native birth rates are increasing (Manitoba Children and Youth Secretariat, 1997; Waldram, Herring & Young, 1997),

suggesting that aboriginal children and youth represent a significant and growing number of youth exposed to multiple, high risk factors, a trend that is consistent throughout the country.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples[5] (RCAP, as cited in Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 207) summarized the situation facing aboriginal children and youth with the following words:

> "They are the current generation paying the price for cultural genocide, racism, and poverty, suffering the effects of hundreds of years of colonialist public policies. It's as though an earthquake has ruptured their world from one end to the other, opening a deep rift that separates them from their past, their history and their culture. They have seen parents and peers fall into this chasm, into patterns of despair, listlessness and self-destruction. They fear for themselves and their future as they stand at the edge. Yet aboriginal youth can see across this great divide. Their concern about the crisis is leavened with a vision of a better tomorrow."

This characterization and the aforementioned statistical representation describe, in part, many of the young people who are in this study. As a result of their troubles, Native children and youth are often bounced through the child welfare and/or correctional systems, and treatment centers are one stop along the way (see Teichroeb, 1997).

Although culturally-based treatment centers do exist (e.g., Poundmakers Lodge in Alberta), many Native children are still being removed from their families and communities and sent miles away to residential treatment centers and schools that are

run by mostly non-Native staff who deliver interventions that have little or no cultural connection (Witt, 1998).[6] The removal of Native youth from their reserves continues the assimilationist policies that are at the root of many social problems facing Native peoples.

The effects on Native youth who attend an urban treatment center/school include exposure, once again, to a culture that is not only foreign (e.g., as in whitestream Canada), but dangerous (e.g., as in being exposed to youth gangs). On the other hand, to simply declare that this is wrong is to negate other issues. The demand for culturally sensitive Native treatment centers exceeds the supply (Waldram et al., 1997). "Any" treatment facility that provides a physically and emotionally safe respite for children who are neglected or abused is serving an immediate, primary function in the youth's life: to protect the child from further harm. The fact remains that for some a treatment center may provide the most stable environment that they will ever experience in their young lives (Teichreob, 1997). Yet, despite "the best of intentions" (a logic that is hauntingly reminiscent to the reasoned apologies put forward for the disgraceful residential schools), whitestream treatment centers and schools that deliver programs for Native youth in off-reserve, urban, middle class communities will to varying degrees and effects uproot these youth, and may in fact be reproducing conditions that contribute to their oppression.

Native communities throughout Canada are challenged to overcome the unrelenting effects of oppressive, paternalistic government policy[7] whose more harmful programs included the 'assimilationist' residential schools system and the child welfare act (i.e., the Sixties Scoop), which systematically and permanently

removed thousands of Native children from their families and communities (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Haig-Brown, 1988; Miller, 1997; Teichroeb, 1997). The high number of Native children and youth in need of "treatment" is perceived by many to be an outcome of the residential schools system, where "the legacy of the residential schools can be seen on every street corner in Canada. There are thousands of once-proud native people who have been reduced to drunken shells by their experiences in those institutions" (Dickson, as cited in Miller, 1997, p.439).

In a reminder that the disproportionate alcohol abuse in some Native communities cannot be reduced to a biological or cultural origin and that only a minority of aboriginal people struggle with alcohol-related problems, Waldram et al. (1997) state that alcohol abuse arises from "the fairly uniform negative effects of poverty, racism and marginalization stemming from colonization" (p.269). When major socio-economic indicators such as education, employment, and occupational status highlight that Native peoples are the most disadvantaged in Canada (Hunter, cited in Nielsen, 1992), individual efforts to emancipate oneself, "to fit in", particularly in an intolerant or racist climate, can be highly discouraging (MacDonald, cited in Silverman & Nielsen, 1982).

One could argue that the continued removal of Native youth to whitestream treatment centers is a telling sign of how little has changed since colonization with regard to the position of Native peoples within the social and economic order of the larger whitestream society. The social and economic structures that contributed to Native dependence on the social welfare system in the first place are for the most part sustained, thus maintaining the oppressive conditions that contribute to the high

number of Native children in care. Concurrently, the treatment of Native youth in non-local, non-culturally based treatment centers is problematic, and also raises questions regarding the purposes of treatment programs in general.

**The trouble with treating individuals...**

In his study of mental asylums in the XVIII centuries, Foucault (1966) demonstrated how a type of treatment discourse was able to control individuals inside and outside of the asylum through what he calls *governmentality*. By defining delinquents (the mad, women, ethnic minorities, homosexuals, et cetera) against a universal subject, individuals came to be defined as Others and excluded.[8] They could only be included "after forms of treatment" that would normalize them in order to lead "useful, docile, and practical lives". Through governmentality, the state reproduces itself via disciplines (e.g., psychology, education, justice) whose discursive practices reach their capillary level in individuals in their workplaces, schools, and homes, ensuring that, as stated, a populace of docile, practical bodies is maintained.[9] Disciplines employ service workers as the 'statutorily defined person' (the bureaucrat, the teacher, the therapist, the psychologist, the law enforcement officer, the judge ... ), that is, the people through whom power passes (Foucault, 1984).[10] As Foucault (1966) explained, the power-knowledge relations between psychology-individualism operate to normalize individuals in order that society can carry on unaffected.

A parallel can be found in modern day treatment centers that are regulated through the discipline of psychology. By pathologizing the individual (e.g., using categorizations constructed by the American Psychological Association, as in Conduct Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD, Coleman, 1996), a

psychology discourse enables treatment of individuals, while the external educational, organizational, and sociological conditions that lead to the individuals needing treatment go unchallenged. For example, do we know the impact of larger class sizes on a teacher's ability to manage behavior and create an emotionally safe classroom? What of such factors as teacher ethnocentricity that may unwittingly contribute to behavior problems in our schools (McIntyre, 1993)? In a critique of ADHD as a disability category, Reid, Maag & Vasa (1993) suggest that (mainstream) society is sympathetic toward medical models of deviance, where the use of "no fault" labels aids and abets the reification of behavior difficulties into an organic cause or origin. Treatment centers provide special programs (counseling, therapy) for all troubled youth, regardless of their cultural background, according to their *individual* pathologies, while the environmental (i.e., family, school, community, societal) conditions that may have led to their problems remain, for the most part, untouched.[11] These realities echo in the experiences of young people who successfully graduate treatment programs only to return to the "real, material, every day struggles" that life in Canada, circa 2000, challenges them with.[12] Once 'normalized', students who leave treatment programs may be as marginalized from the mainstream as when they first entered treatment. This is a sobering viewpoint.

Treatment centers, and people who work at treatment centers, both by their actions to 'normalize' troubled behavior in order to return troubled youth to the mainstream, but also by being the 'bricks and mortar' of the discourses that keep the 'truth claims' of the dominant social order going, help maintain the process that reproduces the political, social, and cultural contexts that, particularly in the case of

aboriginal youth, contribute to youth needing care in the first place. By fixing the child (and not the conditions that make the child need fixing), even the best program in the most "reclaiming" environment may, in the long run, only serve to reproduce the powerful conditions that place marginalized populations in treatment centers: thus the recurring metaphor of the environmental disaster that I have alluded to earlier.

**The Circle Game*: The practice of pathologizing Natives***

In *The Circle Game,* which was derived from a report on Residential Schooling the authors had made for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1994, Roland Chrisjohn and Sheri Young (1997) call attention to the "pernicious" nature by which aboriginal survivors of residential schools (and their families, communities) have been pathologized in what has been termed "residential school syndrome". Briefly stated, Chrisjohn and Young argue that by pathologizing the effects of the residential schools, the "standard account" (i.e., the accepted version as documented in RCAP[13]) serves to draw attention away from the *crimes* that were committed against aboriginal communities through the process of residential schooling. While the structure of their arguments is not painted with terminology from a Foucauldian discourse, their ideas are similar: by employing a psychological discourse founded upon "individualism", aboriginals can be constituted as sick and in need of treatment. The metaphor of *The Circle Game* evokes an image of "truth games" which are *empowered* by the power/knowledge relationships played out through the networks of disciplines that together function to sustain the capitalist state. By allocating resources to the treatment and healing of individual Natives who were victims of the residential schools,[14] the money needed to re-build communities is diverted to the professional

classes running the treatment programs and not to the Native peoples themselves.[15] The basic premise: "The internalization and personalization of moral, political, and economic problems is less costly than social justice" (1997, p. 281).

Chrisjohn and Young counter that the pathology should be rightfully located in the system of order that created it (i.e., the sick people are the judges, the teachers, the government and school officials, or as Roland Chrisjohn said, "the normal ones"). By focusing attention on the need to heal individual sickness, Native people are portrayed as (i.e., made to be) subjects who are sick as opposed to subjects who were victims (and survivors, Shirt, as cited in Waldram et al., 1997) of a *crime* and in need of moral and financial restitution. Chrisjohn and Young contend that the "standard account" circulates unquestioned and is sustained by connected disciplines, (i.e., the justice system upholds the credibility of the psychological diagnosis), in order to preserve the social and economic order that caused the problem (i.e., government oppression). The (whitestream) Canadian people, through their indifference, intolerance, racism, et cetera, are accused of complicity in sustaining this systemic oppression. In an attempt to disrupt the "individualist" psychological discourse, and counter its effects, Roland Chrisjohn implores his aboriginal sisters and brothers to reject the 'subjectivity' imposed upon them, stating emphatically that "**we are not sick**" (public declaration by Roland Chrisjohn in a reading of *The Circle Game,* Winnipeg, 1998). The authors repeat again and again that the ideology of individualism must be contested, and call for aboriginal therapists to become "activists" in subverting the "triumph of individualism", i.e., *success achieved at the individual and personal level.* In this case, psychology, the authors claim, is not only

irrelevant, but "pernicious", and must be regarded as a very successful public relations program to blame the victim, and to get the victims to blame themselves.

Similarly, Waldram et al. (1997) criticize the cultural and biological arguments that academia/academics have constructed in order to explain aboriginal health issues. As they state, "a complex interdigitation between socio-economic and political factors, including broader historical processes and local circumstances, explain to a greater degree the current situation than do either cultural or biological factors alone" (p. 269). By focusing attention upon perceived (and stereotypical) weaknesses, deficiencies and vulnerabilities, few solutions to aboriginal health problems have been found. Rather, the health professionals and analysts (using their normative assumptions) have been empowered, while aboriginal peoples are effectively portrayed as being "sick" and solely responsible for their own problems. Again, cycles of oppression are sustained through discourse and discursive practices. The more I engage with these arguments, the more I find it difficult not to question and take responsibility for my own complicity in sustaining the oppressive practices and structures that are at the foundation of Canadian society today. In the next section, I will continue this exploration of 'pre-tensions' as I attempt to locate some of the problematic issues surrounding the education of troubled youth.

***The function of normalizing discourses: schooling as emancipation or ... ?***

A primary goal of adolescent treatment center schools is to provide alternative educational programming in a multi-disciplinary approach that provides therapy and counseling in a well-supervised, or, "more restrictive environment" (Schwean, Saklofske, Shatz, & Falk, 1996). These special settings provide a lower teacher-

student ratio where instructional practices can be adapted to promote more reasonable standards of social and academic success (Hallenbeck & Kauffman, 1996). "The key is to build a desire for the student to want to remain in school" (Hallenbeck & Kauffman, p. 47). The expectation is that, once performing successfully as a student, the individual will return to their community school and the mainstream of society. Yet, as Hookimaw-Witt (1998) emphasizes, education is never neutral, it is always geared to reproduce society, and the fundamental question that must be asked is: "*whose society are we preparing youth for*?"

Young peoples' lives are embedded within the discursive practices of a world that moves further into the control of a pan-national corporate culture and economy that sees the nation state replaced by a global network of private corporations and private interests. Tanner (1997) suggests that "young people have become the principal victims of recession and restructuring, and have found themselves at the front of unemployment lines or shut out of the job market completely. More and more young people are out on the street, homeless and hungry, potential recruits for deviant subcultures, and increasingly exposed to crime-producing conditions" (p. 160). During this global economic restructuring, increasing numbers of Canadian youth are being pushed to the margins of society, where structural unemployment and rising child poverty levels remain mostly unaffected by political agendas that essentially deny, ignore, neglect or sustain these realities (Barlow & Robertson, 1994).[16] The United Nations Human Development Report (Knox, 1998) ranks Canada number one in the world for providing a high quality of life *for certain segments of the population.*[17] Yet, as this study indicates, "Canada … has failed to ensure that

everyone has a chance to take advantage of their enviable living standards" (United Nations Development Program, as cited in the Knox, 1998, p. A8).[18]

Speaking of the global corporate culture, James Marshall (1998) suggests that Foucault's notion of governmentality can now be seen as a new form of power that he refers to as *busnopower*, which ensures the reproduction of a consumer society by controlling our choices. "Busnopower aims to form a population of autonomous choosers, who will eventually comply with the structures necessary to fit within and reproduce the world of business. Busnopower is directed at the subjectivity of the person through the mind, through forms of educational practice and pedagogy which shape, through choices in education, the subjectivities of autonomous choosers" (Marshall, p. 44). Busnopower is a variation intended to reflect the new world order, one that sees the sovereignty of the nation state replaced by the more dominant multinational corporation. Of course, both are similar in that the hoped for outcome is that individuals within the population lead "useful, docile, and practical lives" in the service of the capitalistic state. If we are creating school systems which promote an enterprise culture of individualism in the service of the economic and social activities of the government-marketplace,[19] how should a young person situated *outside* the dominant, whitestream culture participate in this schooling? Youth unemployment, particularly in aboriginal populations, communicates to the individuals that the school's training program is preparing them for jobs they may never get, consumer choices they will never be able to make.

For some, *governmentality and busnopower* (Marshall, 1998) are reproduced in a population of whitestream students who uphold the social order by excluding

some of their peers via an "axis of class and race"; i.e., race is a lived cultural dynamic and the brand name of your jeans is a signifier for acceptance or rejection (Hesch, 1995). "Schooling leads to alienation, subordination, and conformity. Instead of providing social mobility and serving as an equalizer for its citizens, it rigidly maintains the class system" (Adams, 1989, p. 138). For education to be truly liberating, it cannot take place within the same institutions (Adams, 1989) that have imprinted the *colonizer's impression* upon the oppressed child (Freire, 1997).

Placing Native children in non-Native schools that promote Euro-centric curriculum contributes to the identity crisis and negative outcomes that a growing number of Native youth face. Adams (1989) argues that the present whitestream curriculum is meaningless to Native students and continues to teach the language, literature, and history of the oppressor as it denies students their language, culture, and essential being (Adams, 1989). To many Native students, a school program that emphasizes job training is farcical because "there is no future employment for Native children through education" and "people live on a day-to-day survival basis in a "racially colonized situation" (Adams, 1989, p.133).

In a series of interviews with four Native pre-service teachers, Hesch (1995) asked each to reflect upon his or her past experiences in public school. One individual responded that school was prison-like and irrelevant.

> *(S)ittin' in those classrooms and listening to those teachers. They'd either be screamin' at ya for doing something to teaching ya something that you couldn't care less about. I didn't enjoy the limited freedom, not being able to express myself, the routine, the prison-like atmosphere...You weren't*

*allowed to talk out in the class until you had your hand up. (The teacher) stood at the front of the class and he talked and you listened.* (p. 108).[20]

Of course, many bodies (i.e., individuals) resist this regime; the resistance can be treated by medication (e.g., anti-depressants or Ritalin[21]), by behavior management (which includes having your name placed on the list for attendance at a treatment center), or by self-regulation through truancy and dropping out.

Whether kids are Native or not, living downtown or on a reserve, their lives are affected by the cultural landscape of their day to day life. In a study that compared reasons for dropping out of school, Wilson (as cited in Brady, 1992) argued that Native and non-Native dropouts shared similar experiences of exclusion and disillusionment in a school system designed only for those in the mainstream, middle class culture. Brady (1996) echoed these sentiments, stating that economic deprivation was at the root of dropping out for both Native and non-Native students. "Both groups appear to be similarly affected by such administrative practices as academic streaming, both report to be treated in a similar manner by their teachers, and both groups perceive themselves to be excluded from the dominant school culture by their peers" (Brady, 1996, p. 15). Faced with such a scenario, should we punish their resistance? Do we know what the ethical imperatives are when teaching/treating/serving/working amongst marginalized youth? These are the types of questions that we, as educators, need to ask ourselves.

Until scholars and practitioners (in all fields) participate in self-reflexive exercises that question how domination is upheld, there will be little celebrating the liberation of the oppressed (see Fox & van Dyck, 1997). Self-reflexivity is a

challenging prospect given the proclivity of Canadian people to ignore or deny the socio-historical problems facing Native peoples.[22] "Historical context and political position are important dynamics in classroom practices" (Tavares, 1998, p. 80, in reference to Elizabeth Ellsworth's critique of the abstraction of critical pedagogies). Unfortunately, in Canada, "educators as well as the general public remain, for the most part, vastly ignorant of the relationships between Aboriginal peoples and the non-Native majority" (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald, 1997).

***A global culture with a "new moral order"***

To further complicate the picture, McLaren (1995) states that America's "predatory culture" is being forged through technocapitalism and reproduced by a "new moral order" that refuses to challenge received truths or accepted conventions that are brought to us daily by that "myth machine" called television (i.e., *as construction, not representation*, see Hutcheon, 1989). As North Americans, we consume constructed images of the world around us and unreflectively reproduce the truths we are fed that so effectively and *affectively*[23] work to de-humanize the pain, suffering, and violence of our global culture (McLaren, 1995). As I listen to the recent tragedies of the Colorado and Alberta high school shootings, I am becoming more aware of how the young people in this study are particularly vulnerable to and effected by "predatory culture". I recall times in the past when my own students would playfully act out scenes of drive by shootings, echo ultra violent *gangsta'* rap in their conversations (see MacDonald, 1998), or call each other "bad ass, lazy Indians." The postmodern blurring of boundaries includes the separation between fact and fantasy, image and reality. Cycles of violence are played out daily on the television and

computer, in the movie theatre and newspaper. Are today's youth more violent than yesterday's? Youth crime statistics in Canada say no (Tanner, 1996); the ubiquitous presence of violent imagery in our minute to minute lives begs us to differ.

***The co-mingling of child welfare and juvenile justice issues***

The media's continued, pervasive sensationalization of violent youth crime fuels public opinion regarding the need for "get tough" policies for dealing with *all* adolescent deviance (Tanner, 1996). As a consequence, young people involved in minor offences (e.g., property crimes, failure to comply with the administration of youth justice, as in leaving a residence without adult permission) are encountering a juvenile justice system that has less to do with rehabilitation and more to do with retribution and punishment. The criminalization of youth deviance is exaggerated for Native youths, who are six times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Native youth (Teichroeb, 1997).[24] As Judge Kimelman of the Manitoba Provincial Court stated (Gillis, 1999, A5), "… there's a co-mingling of child welfare issues with criminal issues. If you get a 12- 13- or 14- year old woman on the run and committing various acts, stealing a car, and who herself is the mother of a child, these are really child welfare issues that should be dealt with, and they're not [dealing with them]."

In her ethnographic study of female gang members in New York, Campbell (1991) indicated there is a pervasive desire to isolate and control (youth) without the benefit of understanding. "Never mind their poverty, their struggles to raise children, their victimization by fathers and lovers, their need to belong and be accepted. We don't want to hear their problems – they *are* the problem.[25] Count up their crimes and show us how to spot them early" (Campbell, 1991, p. xiii). Again, when the focus is

on *treating* the individual without recognition of societal factors, cycles of youth risk are continually sustained and reproduced, because the social conditions that produce the risk (the "power relations") remain unchallenged.

And so, young people who have difficulty negotiating the tensions of poverty, racism, abuse or neglect in their homes, schools, and communities often find themselves caught up in the judicial or child welfare systems, where the vagaries of (political) public policy will then determine one's luck in the treatment process. End of century treatment for "troubled" behavior includes a nasty potpourri of profit-oriented prescriptions (e.g., Ritalin) and *privatized* penitentiary settings. The luckier of these young people may find themselves on the waiting list for a treatment center. If future research in this area is going to investigate how our culture produces these children, then socio-political discourses must be dissected to investigate their effects upon the "cultural landscape of the present day."

***Fessing up... (to the pre-tensions in our work)***

As a whitestream Canadian doing cross-cultural 'research' with a group of less-privileged Native and non-Native youth at the treatment center/school, I realize that I too am in some ways, through this research, re-producing the conditions that continue to oppress troubled youth. By focusing my attention, time, and resources on an adolescent treatment center school that in a Foucauldian sense "treats" the individual, i.e., normalizes their behavior in order that they can return to a "regular" public school, I recognize my complicity in helping to sustain the power relations of the dominant social and economic order. Despite this and other tensions mentioned

earlier, I will still try to write a hopeful research story about an active living program at a treatment center/school. Is there an ethical way to live with these contradictions?

My justification goes like this: I believe that treatment centers are more humane than prisons and jails. Despite the problematic nature of the psychology-individualism discourse that pathologizes individuals, I believe that treatment processes are more habilitative than punishment and retribution. I believe in the protection of children and youth, which includes the priorization of their physical and emotional safety in treatment centers and schools. I believe that to eradicate youth risk requires a fundamental change in the social and economic order of the dominant society. As structural changes are unlikely to occur in the near future, the presence of adolescent treatment centers will endure and research studies in this area will remain relevant.

I believe that culturally based treatment centers and schools should be provided for all communities in Canada. I also believe that it will be years before this becomes a reality. As long as marginalized youth are placed into care in whitestream programs run by whitestream professionals, cross-cultural research is necessary to identify what it is that "reclaims" troubled youth, and what it is that "reproduces" the realities facing troubled youth. I also believe in the value of "play" and "fun", and the right of children to experience the developmental benefits of play and games at some point in their life. The simple example of a school that subverts traditional curriculum by increasing physical education "play" time is already questioning the assumptions of the dominant Eurocentric model, and invites the question "why is this worthwhile" and "how has this come to be" (O'Reilly, 1998). It also places into action Hookimaw-

Witt's (1998) most significant question: "which society" are the students being prepared for?

An inner city teacher who has worked for years with disadvantaged youth recently asked, "How will your work influence practice?" I had just spent months preparing for my candidacy exams, which to me was a very privileged, solitary experience of thinking and writing and studying. Her question struck to the core of what was troubling me about my work. I thought for a minute, then I weakly responded: "… Uh, if I write a good paper and its published, well…maybe someone will read it." Not a very powerful outcome as I compare my three years studying to her daily interactions as a kindergarten teacher in an inner city school. I feel the same way about the teachers and staff at the treatment center. Surely they are contributing more than I am? Yet, in three years of studying, I now know that there is more to it. Amelioration must extend beyond the schoolyard. Thoughtful scholarship is needed to study the powerful discourses that are affecting young people, particularly for those who are oppressed, on a day to day basis.

If this paper I write somehow compels others to pick up on the 'truth claims' I present, however "modest" they may be, then perhaps some of the less helpful discursive practices that currently dominate the discourses affecting young people might be challenged (e.g., the boot camp, punishment discourse, see Brendtro and Long, 1994). Perhaps some teachers will think twice about their own discursive practices and the effects upon their students? At best, I may get my degree, thus allowing me to occupy a new position from which to engage and perhaps disrupt potentially harmful power-knowledge discourses regarding troubled youth. At worst,

my time, energy, and efforts here will only serve to reproduce the dominant social and economic order that maintains the conditions from which inequality, oppression, abuse, and neglect of children are sustained.

Jennifer Gore (1993) reminds us that Foucault's mantra "*everything is dangerous*" includes our own emancipatory education practices, however well intentioned. If this is true, should not the title of this paper read: *Reclaiming or reproducing? Active living and troubled youth.* Yet, at the risk of sounding like a reactionary apologist, we are all complicit, in one form or another, in reproducing the conditions that are leading to the "children's crisis", that leave our best educational practices, optimistically, *as less harmful* than the rest. If, like an epitaph, a title sums up a research project, then perhaps mine should open with: *active living ideas for teachers of troubled youth: proceed with caution.*

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[1] Pretentious: claiming or demanding a position of distinction or merit, especially when unjustified (ITP Nelson Canadian Dictionary, 1997).

[2] Claude Denis (1997) replaces the term mainstream with the word *whitestream* in order to better reflect that Canadian society, although founded upon a predominantly European "white" experience, is more than simply *white* in terms of socio-demographic, cultural, and economic terms.

[2] That is, unattached due to broken social bonds with their families, schools, or society in general.

[3] It's difficult to understand how Julian Tanner's (1996) book *Teenage Troubles. Youth and deviance in Canada* completely ignores the over-representation of Native youth in Canadian crime statistics. In fairness to Tanner, his critique of youth deviance in Canada drew upon empirical study, theoretical viewpoint, and "official" crime and delinquency statistics that made no reference to Native populations. This oversight, however, sharply detracts from an otherwise interesting read of the effects of global restructuring of the economy upon Canadian youth. His comparison of youth crime (e.g., property offences mostly committed by lower class males) to corporate crime (e.g., environmental crimes mostly committed by upper class white males) is a startling reminder of the myths used to promote the needs of those in dominant positions of power in our society.

[4] Regarding terminology, I will for the most part follow the example of the editors of the *Canadian Native Education Journal* (Wilson & Wilson, 1998) who use the term Native to include all Indigenous peoples, be they status, non-status, Métis, Canadian or American.

[5] The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was established in 1991, and synthesized years of public inquiry that included over 350 research studies, public reports, and roundtable discussions into a

five volume, 3,596 page *Final Report*. More than 200,000 pages of research, testimony, and reference information has been distributed in CD-ROM format by the Royal Commission (Dawson, Karlis, & Georgescu, 1998).

[6] As a recent example, in the aftermath of another youth suicide on the Shamattawa reserve in northern Manitoba, local Native leaders were pleading, through the media, for the establishment of a local treatment center (CBC Manitoba, November 22, 1998).

[7] From treaties that were not honoured (Adams, 1989; Dyck, 1997; Mercredi & Turpel, 1994; Teichroeb, 1996) to the institution of total government control over social and economic activities (e.g., the potlatch, an economic system which included dancing and feasting, was banned from 1884-1961, see Haig-Brown et al., 1997; Paraschak, 1996; Valaskakis, 1993) to absolute control over education (Dyck, 1997; Haig-Brown, 1988; Miller, 1997), to legislated sexual discrimination against Aboriginal women (Silman, 1997), Aboriginal peoples have endured systemic oppression, poverty, and racism in Canadian society (Adams, 1989; Bryizinski, 1989; Dyck, 1997; Waldram et al., 1997), the effects of which are thought to touch many aboriginal communities today.

[8] Examples in the literature show how aboriginal youth are often identified in opposition to "the white Ideal" (i.e., a healthy, white, middle class adolescent, Adams, 1989), while (all) youth at risk are identified in relation to "the societal norm" (see Reid et al, 1994). By using such reference points, all *others*, or, I could say, Foucault's omnipresent *Other*, is reproduced time and again, as individuals in need of some treatment to correct their anomalies.

[9] As an example, McLaren`s (1993) ethnographic study of a "tough", inner city neighbourhood school in Toronto shows how relationships of class, capital, ethnicity, gender, and power are reproduced through rituals of instruction. The "eros denying quality of the school" (for example, repression of the flesh and body as a means of control) trains students to be workers in low-level jobs germane to the worker state.

[10] According to Foucault, power is exercised, not owned.

[11] The need for more collaborative approaches in dealing with youth problems is now being addressed (see Davis, 1996), and some treatment programs do offer family and cultural programming.

[12] In 1993, a group of Innu children who were sniffing gasoline in Davis Inlet were flown, amid national media attention, to Poundmakers Lodge in Alberta for treatment and rehabilitation. After six months of therapy, they returned to the community of Davis Inlet, where the root causes of their substance abuse, i.e., poverty and despair, had remained unchanged. Within months, most children returned to gasoline sniffing (Waldram et al., 1997).

[13] Their reading of the "standard account" conceptualizes it as one that neatly explains the residential school experience as evolving out of good intentions (of the government, the religious groups, and the Canadian people) unwittingly gone bad, the legacy of which has been an aboriginal population with severe psychological and social problems.

[14] As recommended by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which Chrisjohn and Young oppose.

[15] When I read these words, I was reminded of my own walk to the nice car after a day's work at the treatment center. Like doctors, and nurses, and psychologists, and teachers, and university professors, I can now see more clearly what is meant by professionals being paid to deal with issues in ways that help ensure that the discipline's place in the reproductive loop remains secure.

[16] In the government of Manitoba's Plan Manitoba policy document, children are described as the "most fundamental social investment we make in our society" (Manitoba Children and Youth Secretariat, 1997). These statements are made as the government cuts back on social programming for children in a province whose capital city has been declared 'child poverty capital of Canada' for many years running.

[17] Using 1995 statistics, the report states that almost 12% of Canadians live in poverty, 17% are functionally illiterate, 9% will likely die before sixty, and 1.3% of the workforce suffers long term unemployment. Additionally, one in six Canadian children (about one million) are thought to live in poverty (Hubka, 1992).

[18] Responding to the UN Report, Ken Boessenkool, an analyst with the C.D. Howe Institute, rejected the UN conclusion that 12 per cent of Canadians are living in poverty, stating that "...that means that one in every 10 people is living in poverty. I don't think that reflects anyone's perception of reality

anywhere in the country." The C.D. Howe Institute is known as a 'right wing' research foundation that is funded through donations from the multi-national business sector. Apparently the researchers at this Institute have never been downtown or on a Native reserve in Canada.

[19] Private enterprise has now penetrated the classroom through increased corporate advertising connected to educational resources (Barlow & Robertson, 1994).

[20] Italics from original text.

[21] In a stand out article, Christian (1997) analyzed years of research investigating the causes and effects of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in the classroom, and proposed that ADHD is more a reproduction of the school's body management system than a biological disorder. "With a history of behaviors labelled as inappropriate, disruptive, and deviant, the psychiatric profession had the basis for developing a disorder around school behavior" (Christian, 1997, p. 33). The result: a social problem is reduced to a neurophysiological condition. From 1990-1994, pharmacological prescriptions for the psychostimulant Ritalin have increased 390%, and an estimated 2 million school-aged children are now medicated in the United States (Wallis, as cited in Christian). Ritalin use in Canada is 1998 is four times greater than it was in 1990, and has doubled in the past four years (Unland, 1998; Wood, 1998).

[22] Foucault suggests that regimes of truth (e.g., Canadian history that denies the oppression of Native peoples) can be subverted through discursive breaks that present possibilities for new power-knowledge relations (or, a new politics of truth) to emerge. One could argue that the growth of the aboriginal population is reaching such levels that the government, in hopes of being re-elected, must now address the needs of this expanding constituent base. As well, the migration of aboriginal populations into the core area of larger, urban centers has localized issues of poverty and oppression (e.g., high unemployment rates, high drop-out rates) closer to the formerly (geographically) insulated whitestream population. For years, whitestream society could ignore or remain isolated from or indifferent to aboriginal kids killing themselves on reserves. When the violence touches closer to home, (as in the recent killing of Jeff Giles, a twenty year old store clerk in my own neighbourhood in Winnipeg, see MacDonald, 1998), the social, economic, and cultural regimes of truth are dis-oriented. All of a sudden, the dead boy could be any one of *our* (whitestream) kids, and public pressure mounts to find a solution.

[23] McLaren's emphasis.

[24] A "Treaty Indian" boy has a 70% chance of one stay in prison between sixteen and twenty-five years of age (Mercredi & Turpel, 1994).

[25] Campbell's emphasis.

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## CHAPTER 3

### Teachers, Tensions, and Troubled Youth: A Documentary Narrative about Re-connecting Students to a School Environment

***Just another day at Macdonald school…***[1]

It's ten after nine in the morning. Dave, the principal, is sitting at his desk and sifting through a stack of papers. He has just finished making a tour of the classes down the hall. He's walked into each one, greeted the students by name, teased a few teachers, reminded everyone to be watchful of the teachers' aides ("keep an eye on them", he winks to one young girl in the corner of the class, "you know how they like to sneak off and go golfing"). Some kids laugh, some ignore him, some bug him back. One of them asks Dave when he can switch rooms, reminding him that "you said I could change if I didn't like it." Dave tells him to come see him next class.

When he's back in his office, he picks up the phone, dials, and waits: *ring ring ring ring ring* As he waits, he starts reading one of the messages waiting for him on his desk. Finally, he hears a click on the other end of the line. "Bobby?" he says, smiling into the receiver. "Wakey, wakey. This is Uncle Dave calling. Are you coming to school today?" His voice has its familiar lilt, a dead pan serious pitch that conveys wisdom with wit, seamlessly mixing the two. "Mmm hmmm…" Dave replies into the receiver. "Yes there's basketball going on at lunch." Another pause. "Mm hmmm. Are they playing basketball this afternoon in gym class? I don't know. Wait. There's Ronda, I'll ask."

Ronda is the phys. ed. teacher who has just walked by Dave's open office door. Dave calls out her name and then says, "Bobby's on the line, he's just woken up and wants to know if we're playing basketball at school this aft?" Ronda shrugs her shoulders, says, 'why not?' and turns to ask the two students in her tow if that's okay as they walk off together.

"Double header Bobby. Get your shoes on. …. You'll be here in an hour? Good for you. I'll tell Auntie Mary to expect you. Don't forget to brush your teeth."

Dave hangs up the phone and calls over to Mary, the office secretary, that Bobby is on his way to school.

Three days later, Mary is sitting in the office. The phone rings and she answers, then replies "One minute please." She calls over to Dave in his office and says, "The police are on line one." Seconds later, Dave walks out of his office and asks Mary if Bobby made it to school three days ago. "The police are looking for some kids who did that hold up in the neighbourhood. Our Bobby matches the profile." Dave waits while Mary looks up the attendance roster. "Yes, Dave, he was. He arrived at 10:30 and stayed all afternoon." "Thank you, Mary," he says. He passes on the message then returns to other matters that cross his desk.

**Researching local stories of "practice wisdom"**

**in efforts to "reclaim" troubled youth**

In their book *Reclaiming youth at risk: our hope for the future*, Brendtro, Brokenleg, and van Bockern (1990) promote the need for "reclaiming" school environments that will help recover, redeem, and restore value to troubled youth. Among the features of powerful "reclaiming" environments, the authors highlight the need for schools to be supportive, to encourage a sense of belonging, and to involve young people in determining their own future (Brendtro et al.; 1990). The authors also make reference to the growing knowledge base built from "practice wisdom", where "researchers are investigating characteristics of outstanding schools in order to develop models for effective practice" (Brendtro et al., p. 1). While I have a nascent reticence to engage the simplistic comfort that the words "models for effective practice" conjure up, I do strongly agree that questions regarding effective pedagogy must be addressed in what Hellison (1991) referred to as the "swamp of practice." Local scholarship is needed to explore the socially constructed and fragmentary "subjugated knowledges" of local teacher practice (Usher & Edwards, 1994), not as a

means to develop an emancipatory grand narrative about "reclaiming", for example, but rather as a method to understand the contingencies of real, material, everyday local struggles (Foucault, 1980; Gore, 1993). In the 'local' story I am about to present, teachers who work side by side with troubled youth must negotiate the daily tensions involved in trying to 'recover, redeem, and restore value' to a highly marginalized, highly oppressed subculture of our society.

The Macdonald narrative above has been reconstructed from anecdotes (Polkinghorne, 1995; van Manen, 1997) about the connected days in the life of an adolescent treatment center/school. The plot has been reconfigured such that we, as outsiders, can witness how one principal uses humor, personal contact, flexibility, choice, and record keeping to communicate to Bobby (and others) that they "belong" and have some control over their school day. For Bobby and many others like him the educational imperative is to get them *to* school and *away* from the possibilities of the street, where "situational opportunities" (Halas & Watkinson, 1999; Sullivan & Wilson, 1995) often provide more attraction (and sometimes more danger) than the routine of just another school day. Also embedded within the narrative is the idea that a principal is willing to do what it takes to help get a student to school. In these "reclaiming" moments, the traditional academic discourse that dominates in most schools has been disrupted.

My interest in presenting this story evolved out of my own past experiences as a physical education teacher working with troubled youth (Halas, 1998). I remember the day the police had called to see if Bobby had been at school. For me, it was a poignant reminder of the harsh societal realities facing the young people in my classes.

As I recall, Bobby hated school, and in particular, he hated coming to Macdonald. He liked basketball. But even then, he wasn't always happy; at times, it was a challenge to have him on the court, never mind in the classroom. Nevertheless, the reality for us, as teachers in the school, was that we had to accept all students in our classes no matter how difficult their present disposition or their previous issues. Our goal was to provide a nurturing and relevant curriculum that would 'reclaim' troubled youth by re-connecting them with a school environment, in whatever ways possible.

**The cultural landscape of 'troubled' youth**

Young people who attend treatment centers arrive at school each day with a different kind of 'savoir faire' than that of their peers at the neighbourhood school down the road. In their young lives, many of these children and youth have acquired the embodied knowledge of what it means to have been emotionally, physically, or sexually abused, to have experienced real loss, actual hunger, or complete hopelessness, to have an addiction to solvents, or drugs, or alcohol, to be a failure in school, an outcast in the neighbourhood, or a criminal in the eyes of society. They are the ones identified as having "inappropriate" social skills (Reid, Tremblay, Pelletier, & McKay, 1994). They are referred to in the research literature as 'deviant', 'delinquent', 'disturbed', or 'disordered'. Yet, as a Macdonald staff member pointedly asked, is there an appropriate response for being screamed at, or having a penis placed up your bum when you are ten years old? What about the leftover cigarette scars on your legs, or the belt marks that cross your back? When a young child grows up as a witness to family violence (as an example), do we know what the *normative response* for that child, under those circumstances, should be (Katz, 1997)? And, as I have

asked previously, do we know what the educational imperatives for these students are, and if so, to what extent they are ethical (Halas, 1998)?

While troubled youth have the embodied knowledge of various forms of abuse or oppression, their lives are also embedded within a matrix of cultural, historical, and political contexts that construct, constrain, and enable the possibilities of who they, as individuals in society, can become. In the Macdonald context, young peoples' lives are embedded within treatment versus punishment discourses emanating from the 'co-mingled' juvenile justice and child welfare systems (Brendtro & Long, 1994; Gillis, 1999; Reising, 1996). Their school lives are embedded within interconnected education and psychology discourses, where diagnosis (e.g., ADHD) can lead to pharmaceutical intervention (e.g., Ritalin) for social problems that students experience in the classroom (see Christian, 1997). For Native students, their lives are embedded within a century of socio-historical oppression that included the Residential schools system and the Sixties Scoop, policies of assimilation that attacked the cultural dignity of their parents and grand parents (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Miller, 1997; Teichroeb, 1997). Today, the basic extraction features of the residential schools remain as Native youth are flown out of their reserves to be 'treated' in whitestream[2] treatment facilities.

The truth claims of today's political discourse tell us that the "treatment" of aboriginal youth in urban centers is less expensive than building local treatment centers on reserves (as an example, see Teichroeb, 1997). Should a policy of local treatment ever be adopted, the financial cost of providing therapy opportunities for individuals would be less expensive and disruptive (to the dominant society) than

actually allowing Native peoples to control their own social and economic lives (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997). While it is not my intent in this paper to deconstruct the socio-cultural lifeworlds, or cultural landscapes of the youth at Macdonald, it is necessary to highlight that their lives are not 'acontextual', nor 'ahistorical'. Rather, their lives are affected by multiple, complex, and often conflicting 'real' discourses that have real day to day effects on their lives.

As I reflect upon my own previous efforts as a teacher at the treatment center, I am becoming more aware of the problematic nature of "reclaiming" troubled youth in a societal context that is "reproducing" the conditions that troubled youth must face on a daily basis. In this paper, I will try to show how teachers at Macdonald school negotiate these tensions as they are encountered in the cultural landscape of the day to day happenings at the school. In particular (for this is in large part what makes Macdonald school unique), I will investigate how teachers use active living/physical activity/play as an integral aspect of each school day. To better understand how basketball, for example, might have helped keep Bobby off the streets that one day, I needed to return to Macdonald school and spend time listening, watching, interacting, playing, questioning, and recording events as they happened. So began the fieldwork of this interpretive case study that would cross over a period of two academic years and involve the active participation of students and staff as they talked about their school and their physical activity experiences.

**Researched tales: A documentary narrative**

My attempt to research the culture of Macdonald school is presented here in the form of a 'documentary narrative', where words, metaphors, phrasing, and

imagery are pieced together through the presentation of fieldwork data (Sparkes, 1996). As Sparkes suggests, coming to understand a culture is a continuous process of interpretation, of "cracking open" the day to day happenings such that multiple and often conflicting interpretations are put forward for consideration. Local scholarship is needed not to speak for others or provide alternative worldviews, but (to borrow words from Foucault, cited in Marshall, Peters & Fitzsimons, 1997) "as an activity that is conducted alongside those who struggle for power", who question accepted truths and disrupt harmful practices.[3] Consequently, this ethnographic tale should be read not as a representation of the teachers' views (although their words and practices will frame my interpretations). Rather, the story should be read as my own personal effort to understand the "multiple voices and visions" (Sparkes, 1996) of my former colleagues who have so strongly incorporated active living into their own evolving interpretation of a nurturing and relevant curriculum for troubled youth. As the authors of a community based research project describing the culture of an aboriginal high school remind us (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald, 1997), there are as many understandings of a place as there are people in a study. As such, my impressions are presented as a fictional tale based on the lives lived at the school.

As an example of what the author himself calls 'poetic invention', Peter McLaren's (1993) compelling ethnographic study of an inner city Toronto school provides a provocative interpretation of how schools, through rituals, symbols, and everyday teacher practices, discipline students into becoming manual laborers thus reproducing the divisions between class and race that serve to uphold the social and economic order of our times. He describes for us a scenario where teacher beliefs

surrounding the 'cultural deprivation' of their lower class, minority ethnic students lead them to objectify students as "vagrant", "medieval", "primitive", "below average", and "a bad crop of kids" due to "bad sperm". Teachers, who themselves are controlled by the burden of administrative rules and standards, both willingly and unwittingly transform the behaviors of their students, thus making them into docile, pliable, volitional, and obedient interns for the "mind-deadening, spirit-breaking norms of the factory" (p. 175). By detailing the gestures and nuances of student resistance to the teachers and their practices, McLaren provides a compelling look at how school failure happens, and continues to happen, in the service of the dominant society.

In McLaren's study, students must negotiate their movements back and forth between their lives outside of school, or, as he says, the "streetcornerstate", and the eros-denying "states" that are imposed upon them inside the school. Teachers, McLaren warns, must seriously consider the various cultures from which student identities are formed without ignoring the larger political context from which those contexts emanate. "Rituals of instruction should not be attempts to manipulate students by completely sealing off the streetcorner state" (p. 237), McLaren writes, rather, students should be allowed to plan their own time and find their own ritual rhythms and spaces in which they feel comfortable.

In constructing this Macdonald story, I will adopt some of the research techniques used by McLaren to show how active living has become part of the daily ritual at the school. On paper, Macdonald's mandate is to re-connect their students with a school community. This word 're-connect' translates into a number of different

day to day teacher practices, each one having a different function relating to the primary goal. The first priority is to get kids to school; once there, the educational objectives move in a more concentrated effort toward the development of appropriate social skills that will enable students to function more successfully with their peers and adults. Christian (1997) suggests that classrooms are the single most important empirical indicator of a young person's ability to perform the 'bodily demands of normal society.' If troubled youth are to find a place within the 'norm' of society, then their behaviors must first become 'normalized' within the school or treatment facility.[4] Broadly defined, therefore, success depends upon an individual's ability to function in the school as a 'normal student'.

Speaking to the challenge of re-connecting young people to a school environment, the principal described how the behavior of many of the students at Macdonald has been highly effective in keeping adults and systems at a distance. As a consequence, such underlying issues as "poor self-esteem, substance abuse, depression, or severe learning difficulties" have often been avoided. The challenge for teachers at the treatment center becomes one of finding ways to build relationships with young people in a climate that is often wrought with all kinds of merging, indeterminate tensions that are expressed throughout the school day. In a summary statement of the cultural landscape of the youth at Macdonald, the principal writes:

> Principal: Their long history of failure in school, compounded with difficulties in other areas of their life, result in a very negative attitude toward learning and school in general. Initially, our students present as angry, frustrated, distrustful of adults, impulsive, and they have a very

poor self-esteem. These presenting problems are somewhat predictable when one fully understands the chaotic and dysfunctional environments in which these children lived prior to placement.

For many of these students, the treatment center school may be their last dance in the education system; any hope of re-integration into the community school can only happen with some evidence of significant change in the way they present themselves as 'students'. This is where the teachers' role takes on meaning: in everything they say and do, they have to convince students that school is a chance worth taking. Contrary to McLaren's school, these teachers have little choice but to meet and greet their students' 'streetcornerstate' (as a metaphor for their *outside of school* lives) on a daily basis in their classrooms, where tensions are negotiated in ways different from the usual 'control and punish' manipulations of a regular school. Macdonald school is particularly interesting to me because it is a 'special school' in more ways than one. As I hope to show, part of what makes the school effective is that teachers, through their daily discursive practices (i.e., their actions, language) disrupt some dominant societal discourses (e.g., priorizing academics over all else) in order to better prepare their students for their lives *'outside'* of the mainstream. Although the teachers are complicit in the normalizing discourse of schooling, what they conceive of school differs from the norm. The tensions of a normalizing discourse notwithstanding (and not to be downplayed), the position I will put forward is that this group of teachers is having some positive effects on their students. These effects, however, are highly contextual and limited; while what unfolds may have the look and feel of an emancipatory tale, the reader is cautioned to remember that the

environmental conditions facing these young people are for the most part, overpowering.

The remainder of this paper is divided into two main sections, which I will label Parts I and II. The first half of the discussion will focus on the teachers and how they interpret the cultural landscape of their students, thus allowing them to understand more fully the daily tensions of the "contact zone" (i.e., that point where teachers and students meet and interact in unequal relations of power, see Brown, 1998). The second half of the paper will focus on the active living program and how it is used by the teachers to negotiate tensions throughout the school day.

In Part Ia, I will discuss three conditions that have enabled this group of Macdonald teachers to exercise power in determining what a nurturing and relevant curriculum is for their students. In Part 1b, I will adopt what Wetherall and Potter (1988) call a "discourse approach to social psychology" in order to illustrate how teachers interpret the cross-cultural divide that separates them from their students, thus allowing tensions in the "contact zone" to be negotiated more successfully. A discourse approach is used as a method for the analysis of the language and discursive practices of the teachers in order to identify how the students' subjectivities (i.e., as socially constituted selves, see Fitzsimmons, 1998) might be affected. Similar to discourse analysis (Bové, 1995), the "*discourse approach*" I am proposing will address questions of the "subject" and involves a certain hypothesizing about the purposes and consequences of language (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). It is not *impossible* for human beings to create their own subjectivities within given power relations, but it *is* very difficult, particularly for those whose identities are

marginalized by the actual extant defining forms of power (e.g., race, see Bové, 1995). By appropriating the tools of a Foucauldian discourse, I might ask: what effects do the "truths" teachers hold regarding their students reproduce on, by, for "the bodies" of the students at Macdonald school in order that they 'perform as students'? It is from this standpoint, that is, one that attempts to show how the teachers incorporate the socio-cultural lifeworlds of their students, that my subsequent interpretation of the active living program can take shape.

In Part II, I focus upon the use of physical activity and play as a 'peda/logical tool' for negotiating tensions in the "contact zone."[5] Tensions at Macdonald school can be quite high, and active living has evolved as a logical means by which this group of teachers attempts to 'reclaim' their students. By combining more traditional methods of qualitative analysis (i.e., theme construction arising from shared reflections and divergent views, Patton, 1990) with a continued attention upon the functions and purpose of discourse, I have located five different 'theme functions' by which play and physical activity are used 'discursively' within the school. The analysis in this section is supported by more textual data from transcripts, fieldwork observations, field notes, and field documents.

There's an inside joke that surfaces every now and again amongst the staff at Macdonald School that is at once simple and profound: "we're all here for some reason." However bland this statement might look on paper, the underlying message is meant to conjure up the notion that like the troubled youth in their care, teachers, for some idiosyncratic reasons, are also at the treatment center because somehow they too are '*other to*' the educational mainstream, or, the *norm* of society. It is a phrase meant

to capture the unreality and quirkiness of the place, an unlikely mosaic created by putting all the students and all the staff, with all their individual peculiarities, into the same box. The box is the tiny school structure, where the 'unreal' emerges out of the oddness of things, where the unexpected can turn up in complete disassociation to whatever else is going on. It is also a place where play and laughter happen. It is a laughter in juxtaposition to the sadness and frustration that accompanies the young people each day. It is a story that is from instant to instant always unfolding, and should be read as such.

**Part 1a: Exercising Power at the Treatment Center**

> Once upon a time, a group of teachers gathered round at the year end staff meeting to plan the following year's timetable. With the thoughtful stroke of a pen, they re-arranged the academic courses, such that all the core subjects were moved to the morning, and daily physical education, life skills training and activity based option courses were added to the afternoon schedule. When they were done, they went swimming. Not everyone swam, but those who didn't knew that they were at the very least welcome in the water. Thus begins this story about teachers and active living and exercising power and playfulness at the adolescent treatment center school.

As a starting point, I would like to discuss the conditions that made this move toward a more active living curriculum possible. Macdonald school would be characterized in the research literature as a 'habilitative' or 'more restrictive environment' for students with emotional and behavioral *dis*-orders[6] (Hallenback & Kauffman, 1996; Schwean, Saklofske, Schatz & Falk, 1996). A common feature of more restrictive, habilitative schools is that they are small, thus enabling the creation of a safer, more nurturing climate for the students, and, I might add, the staff

(Schwean et al., 1996). Macdonald school houses 45 residential and day treatment students, most of whom have experienced difficulties in their home, school, and communities. In one school year, approximately 110 - 125 female and male students, aged 10 - 17 years, are registered at the school, resulting in a school population that may turn over two to three times in a ten-month period. As part of a more supportive, nurturing environment, all students call the teachers by their first names and are clustered into small groups either by gender and age, academic level, or other defining characteristics that seem appropriate at the time (e.g., shared interests). As a 'special school', there is less pressure to conform to top-down, prescriptive curriculum design and delivery, which is the current educational trend in North America (Barlow & Robertson, 1994). Rather, students are expected to achieve 'reasonable' measures of social and academic achievement (Hallenbeck & Kauffman, 1996; Quinn, Epstein, & Cumblad, 1995; Schwean et al., 1996), as defined by teachers working in the school.

Another enabling feature of these more restrictive environments is that they can conversely be less restrictive for the staff, particularly, as is the case, at Macdonald, where the principal has a very easy-going, humorous, and in many ways, subversive personality. To support this characterization, I offer the following citation from my field notes, which were taken at the close of an early morning staff meeting:

> Principal: Oh, and before we all go out and win a million, here is your 98-99 calendar, as opposed to your 98-98 calendar, which of course replaced the ... (everyone laughs.)

In the normal chain of accountability, principals are the link between the regional administrative authorities and the teachers delivering curriculum in the schools. In a

power-knowledge discourse (Foucault, 1980), principals are considered the "statutorily defined person" through whom power and knowledge passes. At Macdonald, the current principal acts as a buffer between what is happening in the school and how what is happening is perceived by others outside the school. He creates opportunities for staff members to exercise power in such important areas as curriculum design (adding daily physical education, as one example of the many large and small structural changes that happen throughout any school year), and then he supports their decisions where necessary. In fact, the principal often removes himself from the decision making process, thus ensuring that teachers themselves exercise responsibility regarding what they believe to be the individual, *particular* educational needs of their students. If basketball is what does it for Bobby, than efforts are made to include basketball in Bobby's school program, even when that means ignoring the core curriculum. I say this mostly to highlight the contingencies that frame this Macdonald story, and how the current crop of people working at Macdonald school choose to exercise power by doing things differently. The enabling conditions of a more restrictive environment notwithstanding, it is the confluence of power, personality and personal conviction that enables this 'active living' story to take place.

And why 'active living'? In my first year as a teacher in the school, a respected psychologist working with our students came to speak to us in one of our staff meetings. As I recall, he sat down and got right to the point: due to societal conditions, maybe 30% of our students would be able to get a job and achieve some kind of independent living. The rest could at best expect life on welfare, and if schooling was going to be relevant, students should be taught how to achieve a certain

'quality' of life in their free time. I remember thinking, 'uh, what'? 'Can he say that'? A meta-narrative of education, and in particular, treatment programs, is that it is the teachers' responsibility to apply instructional practices that will help students to, as Quinn et al. (1995) state so forthrightly "develop all the skills they will need to fully benefit from and contribute to the communities in which they live" (p. 41). That someone holding this position of authority so pointedly disrupted a grand myth of our society, i.e., that education leads to jobs leads to emancipation,[7] provided further validation that doing things differently was not only legitimate, but important. Programs like woodworking, cooking, life skills training, building and maintaining a greenhouse, building a repertoire of recreational activity skills, doing volunteer work, should complement an academic program that for many students, involved basic literacy and math skills training. Yet, for students to assimilate these skills, they still have to be in school, performing as 'students'. Regardless of the school program, this is a challenge.

**Part Ib: The "contact zone"**

***Monday morning staff meeting, 8:15 am:***

Mary is sitting at the table and waiting for the others to take their seats in the circle of couches and chairs that form a ring around the staff room. Everyone appears to have arrived: school staff, treatment center youth care workers, and clinicians. Frank and Helen walk out of the kitchen with their coffee mugs full, and Bill catches their attention with his usual booming voice. He comments on their matching colors (by coincidence, they are both wearing jeans and a yellow sweatshirt), and mischievously asks if they belong to some team that he and the others have been excluded from. "Oh no," Helen replies, "we would never do that…" The room quickly fills with good-natured ribbing and laughter, and then settles again with a signal from Mary that she is going to start.

Each school day starts with an exchange between the treatment center and school staff regarding each student's "status". Mary begins with a list of students living at the community group home, and says that all but two will be in school today. Of those absent, one has a court case, the other is on a home visit for the week. When Mary finishes her list, the rotation passes to George, the supervisor from the on-grounds residence. He opens by announcing that it has been a "rough weekend," and three girls have gone on the run. They ran on Friday night, he says, and then pointedly mentions that another student, Emily, stayed, but would have run had the opportunity presented itself. As George continues his report, a concentrated stillness transforms the room; kids going AWOL is not a good thing. There is very little protection for children who are out on their own on the streets. Teachers take note to keep an eye on Emily.

The conversation moves on to the other kids who will be in school today. The supervisors identify those who have had a good weekend, and those who haven't. A second supervisor passes on the news that Peter's up-coming foster placement might fall through. "He doesn't know this yet", she says, "he hasn't been told." One staff member greets this news with a quiet but prolonged 'aagghhhhhh' and turns her head as if to deflect the awful news: she knows how much Peter has been looking forward to his new arrangements. Everyone else knows the outcomes that this kind of painful disappointment can trigger. Monday morning has once again settled in with the heaviness of these kids' lives.

The residential staff complete their report and now it's the teachers' turn. They tell a few 'kid' stories of their own from the week before. The phys. ed. teacher mentions how good one of the younger new students was in class the other day. "I was really proud of him," he says. Like the opening up of a painted shut window, his words circulate around the room, lightening up the conversation. One of the teacher's aides mentions that the weather is supposed to be warmer by week's end, and wonders if it wouldn't be a good idea to get every*body* outside for an afternoon. Bill likes this idea, and seconds the motion with a drawn out "It's been a long winter." Ideas of what to do are quickly exchanged, and with a hesitation that is more polite than reluctant, two staff members volunteer to follow up and report back the next day.

At this point, Helen tells a happy story from last week's visit to the Seniors Home. "It was April's 89th birthday, and all the kids were treated to a surprise birthday cake." Many of the staff know April from the weekly visits to the senior's home, and the room fills with an animated "wwwoooowww", as if to say, "imagine that, April is 89 years old." When Mary hears this, she looks up at the group, waits for the right moment then adds a deadpan "*At 89 ... I'll still be here.*" Her comment is greeted with a roar of laughter, which erupts like a cloudburst when another voice melodically adds: "Yeah… Mary will be on the phone to the residence '*they said fuck again.* "' George shakes his head as he gets up to leave. Yet again, the heavy rhythms of the daily reports have been offset by the lightness of laughter. He and the other treatment center staff head back to the residence to get the kids ready for school.

Frank is still smiling at Mary's comment when he suddenly jumps up and walks across the room, calling to the others to "Look at this." Outside the window, a day student who lives in the community is dragging his feet through the snow. His eyes are half shut with sleep, his hair sticking out in all directions, his unzipped jacket blowing in the wind. His image provokes a warm response from everyone in the room. They watch as he saunters right up to the staff room window and presses his nose against the glass. From the inside, Frank greets him by squashing his own face smack back into the window, and they momentarily stare at each other, the warm breath of their mutual playfulness fogging the space between them. One by one, the staff get up to go to their classes. Dave and Bill walk to the locked front doors and open them with big, cheerful hellos that call out the names of each passing student. The day begins.

**Teachers interpret the cultural divide**

When I first introduced Macdonald School as a "cross-cultural" study, my intention was to more fully acknowledge the 'difference' between the white, middle class or 'whitestream' staff members and the students, of which a majority were Native. The word "cross", therefore, was used to more fully situate the potential divisions of power and race that might impact upon the relations between the more

privileged adults and the "oppressed" children and youth in their care. Despite my expanding awareness of the socio-historical oppression of Native peoples in Canada and the lessons learned from the two years I had already spent working in the school, I could not clearly position an opinion about how race was negotiated as part of the school's 'cultural landscape'. As the Native population at the school increased, so did efforts by the staff to use more culturally appropriate teaching methods and materials. Special care was applied to help students safely make the transition into the center, particularly for those students arriving from the cultural 'otherworld' of the reserve. The school was situated in a community in an urban landscape where the racial tensions between whites and Natives were highly charged. Surely this would have an impact upon the school, and in particular, the unequal power relations in the "contact zone"?

And yet, during my efforts to tease out issues surrounding difference, what emerged as the perceived dividing line between students and staff focused less on class and race and more on *life* experience. This is not to say that factors such as race and class were not an acknowledged dynamic within the school, only that in terms of teacher discourse, these factors appeared to be subsumed within a more generalized notion of privilege; that is, teachers knew and were often reminded, on a daily basis, that their lives had never been marked with the kind of hardship that the children in their care had already endured. Race and/or class were issues to be incorporated within the curriculum; students were individuals to be respected and cared for.[8] Although students from diverse backgrounds were to be taught with equal onsideration, their cultural differences remained, in many ways, uninterpreted.

Teachers and other staff often spoke of being "amazed" at how exceptional their students were in negotiating their day to day lives given a 'life experience' landscape that itself was far more difficult than their own.

> Youth care worker: Ah, you know what? I've always been amazed by these… they are probably some of the toughest people, strongest people I know and they, you know, we always forget that by the time they've come to us, they've probably been through more than most of us have ever had to worry about. So they are very strong, they are very resilient and they are adaptable and they are survivors and they know how to take what works and do something with it.
>
> Teacher's aide: …you hear about their lives, and you wonder how they operate as normally as they do.
>
> Teacher: I've always been amazed the times I've listened to their experience and stories and that and I'm saying "Lord knows, if I'd gone through that, I think I'd have packed (it) in long ago. I think I'd have given up long ago." And they don't.
>
> Teacher: … when I see where some of them have come from, it absolutely amazes me that they have the ability or the capacity for compassion and love and caring that they still have and they… in my own situation, having gone through being pregnant there and the absolute care and love that was extended to me and the joy that they were having in the fact that this new baby was arriving and you know. So I guess that gives me hope for certainly those kids that they are not

so jaded, some of them, that they still - they still can find some joy in things, simple things, too. Even the most hardened of some of those cases will still be able to find a little bit of joy in things if they can manage to do it when nobody else is looking sometimes.

Principal: …the kids are here because the system all around them is fucked up.

In these articulations, Macdonald students are described as "people", "tough", "strong", "survivors", "normal", "able", "compassionate, loving, caring, and joyful", "not so jaded", "the most hardened of those cases", "kids" whose problems are generically pronounced as "more than most of us will ever have to worry about." Their troubles are "their lives", "stories", and "experiences" in the "fucked up" system. Rarely is there blame to be proportioned out or labeled, beyond the (somewhat ubiquitous) unidentified 'system'.

The 'system' presents itself on a daily basis each morning at the staff meetings where teachers are informed of the latest movement affecting their students. What happens on the outside leaves its mark on what teachers can expect inside the boundaries of the school day. Be it the judicial system ("… William's court date has been postponed another six months"), the child welfare system ("… they're hoping to move Frances into a Native foster home back on his reserve"), the education system ("… the division is under pressure to place two students on the waiting list for school"), or any other set of powerful discourses impacting on the lives of troubled youth ("… there was another gang beating mentioned on the news last night"), tension informs part of the territory teachers must negotiate with their students on a day to day

basis. While teachers were often only provided with snippets of each student's background, taken as a whole, a picture of the 'system' and how it constrains and constructs each student's life begins to emerge. Having some knowledge of the contextual factors affecting each individual enabled teachers (for the most part) to approach their students with a greater respect for and understanding of their resistance and oppositional behavior in the school. While this understanding and respect allowed teachers to "reconfigure" the way that they exercised their power in the classroom (Usher & Edwards, 1994), the goal remained to regulate how students performed in class. How effective the cultural divide of 'privilege' could be negotiated would depend, in large part, upon how students received and interpreted the messages that teachers were sending them.

**Making students: the effects of discourse on how students perceive themselves**

The use of language has both purposes and consequences which are not necessarily transparent nor intended; what is said, how it plays out in day to day discursive practices, and how it is received, has disparate consequences (Usher & Edwards, 1994; Wetherall & Potter, 1988). In my conversations with students, I often asked them what they thought of their schooling and their teachers at the school. With few exceptions, students gave the school and their teachers a passing grade. Teachers were (for the most part) described as "understanding", "caring", "nice", "funny", "some of them are strict and some are flexible", many are "easy", and most are "better than a normal school." They mostly had a "positive energy" that could at times be "negative" or "bitchy"; some were "good" but could "some days be not so good." Some suggested that "everything in this school teachers do a better job at than in the

other schools," while many responded to my question "who at the school gives you hope?" by generically responding "teachers."

What seemed most significant to me was that for each of these students responding to my questions, they were '*in school*'. They were participating and interacting and had opinions regarding their teachers as typical students would. Given their previous school failure, it seemed to me that Macdonald was on the surface, achieving its primary goal: to re-connect students with a school environment. Yet, statements cannot have uniform interpretations or effects, and for some students, being reminded of why they were at Macdonald wasn't helpful.

> Student: Cause they're like, teachers are always "well all the kids here have problems and all that kind of shit," so it doesn't make you feel good. This whole place doesn't help my self-esteem. Not at all. It makes you feel stupid living in this place.

Identities are made through discourse, and as agents of a power-knowledge nexus (Foucault, 1980), the teachers in this study, through their attitudes, ideologies, strategies, and daily practices, are influencing the young people they contact each day. In what might be called a poststructural take on the 'self fulfilling prophesy,' students' subjectivities (the way they see themselves and the world) are made by the truths they are taught about themselves in all the big and little things that are happening around them. While these students may never have fully achieved the "docile bodies" and "obedient souls" (Foucault, 1979) that they would need to perform as students in a regular school (Christian, 1997), the school's 75% average attendance for the school year suggests that, contrary to what may have been their previous experience, these

students were succeeding as 'students' in a locally defined context. Even the disgruntled student who felt "stupid" living at the treatment center had a 95% school attendance rate for one school year. This was a student who emphatically stated that he only came to school "because of basketball", and if the school didn't have a gym, he wouldn't be coming.

At Macdonald, teachers had adopted a different outlook toward their students and what their students needed in terms of schooling, with varying results. In many ways, they were adapting themselves and their practices as a means to negotiate the tensions inherent in a "contact zone" split apart by a cultural divide of personal life experiences. If students were to be 're-connected with a school environment', teachers would need to integrate into their daily practices what the principal summarized as their fundamental belief: "that the student is valued, that they want to learn, and that they want to be successful."

**Teacher practices: I cast my line, and I reel myself to the fish...**[9]

***When a hot wind blows***

It's just after lunch. The kids arrive like a blustery wind in a cluster of noise, kicking and spinning and punching each other with the built up energy of a coke-caffeine-chips-and chocolate bar power lunch. As they walk up the stairs and turn the corner to the classroom, a few students exchange well chosen profanities with the voracity of a sidewalk spitting contest. Taken all together, the loudness rises through the corridor and fills the air like dust kicked up on a dirt road. When Franklin appears from around the corner, 'bad day' is written all over his face and body. Things are about to get worse cause half way down the hallway and blocking his path, a trio of girls have stopped to 'investigate' the goings-on in the middle classroom where "two of the cute guys" are gathered. As Franklin gets closer his body tenses up, then explodes with a rather restrained "MOVE you stupid girls." Jennifer turns her head

and hisses "Sssssssss…" The girls scarcely budge, forcing Franklin to push his body sideways past them. As he does this, he hoofs the wall (…BANG) and then does it (BANG…) again a few steps further.

A teacher steps out of the classroom to check the commotion, but already Franklin's trail is covered by the other moving bodies. A thundering herd has passed, and it's hard to tell who's who and who did what. Only the black tread marks remain on the wall, but there will be no need for forensics. Calmly waiting for Franklin at the end of the hall is his homeroom teacher. She has been watching. She quietly asks him to head back to the residence and start again next class. Like a well-trained soldier, he immediately turns around, doing an about face; this is a routine he knows. Unlike a soldier, as he leaves, he roars a lamentable "I HATE THIS PLACE."

"I hate this place…I hate this place…i hate this…i hate…" echoes down the corridor, its frustration spreading like an invisible toxin, infesting all the classrooms. Joey, who has arrived a couple minutes after everyone, passes Franklin in the hall. When he enters his class, he walks straight towards Albert, and, without any provocation, pushes him hard in the shoulder with the palm of his hand, saying "Get outta' my chair." Albert responds with a muted "no", which prompts Joey to pull a fist up to the side of his face and gesture a final warning with a sneering tilt of his head. This time the intimidation is more effective. Albert folds his book and gets up. Standing side by side, Joey is bigger than Albert by about a foot. Size matters. As Albert slides his body over to an open chair, he slams his books down on the desk. By the time the teacher intervenes, the air is so thick with conflict, you could cut through it with scissors and still have no opening for the 100% humidity to escape on a hot summer day.

Joey is told to leave the class, and when he does, he kicks over his chair then stares at Albert, mouthing the words "I'm going to kill you." Albert meets him with a more pronounced "Fuck you". He too is asked to go back. For day students, 'back' is a time out room located in the school; for residents, going back means a supervised return to the treatment center. In both cases, center staff will be waiting to deal with the conflict issues. Five minutes into class time, a day student and two residents (including the girl blocking the hallway who had repeatedly refused to go to her own

class when asked) have been sent back from class. Meanwhile, two classrooms empty out and head to the gym for their phys. ed. class.

In a spirited rush to get to the gym, two boys race each other around the corner and down the stairs, passing Albert as he slowly makes his way back to the residence. The first boy gives Albert a friendly elbow as he pushes by him. The second boy adds his little touch by screaming a deep, throaty "Allbbberrrtttt" as he too swings past. "Fuck you," Albert says, raising his middle finger to them both. Frustration is written like a rage ready to break out all over his face and body, just waiting to explode. An on-looking teacher reads this as a sign that says "get back to the residence to calm down." In seven minutes, little Albert has been sent out of school twice. In the upstairs classrooms, teachers begin moving about their rooms; all energy is focused upon the students that remain.

In a special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Special Education*, Hallenbeck and Kauffman (1996) suggested that more restrictive or habilitative schools are like intensive care units, where teachers are trained to use alternative pedagogical methods that include the recognition of small, reasonable successes and behavior management techniques that stretch beyond the usual punishment and suspension, allowing for a more flexible relationship between students and staff. Supporting this move away from 'punishment and suspension', Ellis (1997b) warns that schools cannot be factories "where students simply conform to the control and power of others" (p. 21). In a paraphrase of the recommendations offered to educators by Terry, a twelve year old seriously at-risk student who Ellis interviews, teachers are advised to "start with me, start with us, start with where we are" in all they do. What might appear as shear common sense, that adults working with troubled youth should be empathetic, understanding, and more flexible in dealing with troubled behavior, is not always the

case (Chalmers, 1996; Taylor-Dunlop & Norton, 1997). Negotiating the "contact zone" can be a problematic affair, as the principal was careful to point out.

> Principal: …when a two year old comes over and spills the milk, you can't get mad at a two year old. Some staff need to realize that for some of these kids, they sometimes respond emotionally as a two year old would. That is, there are some things you shouldn't get mad at.
>
> Student: 'Cuz this school is meant for kicked-out kids, and they (teachers), they gotta' expect them to be bad.
>
> Teacher: And a lot of these kids haven't had all of that positive message (…from someone who loves them when they're bad). So why shouldn't they expect the worst and look after number one?

At Macdonald, most teachers did try to "start with where the students are." These teachers used a variety of methods to try to keep students functioning in the class. As small and large tensions played out each day, all staff members were constantly challenged to find ways to keep students positively engaged in the class activity. From humour to hugs to sometimes invisible interventions, some teachers and teachers aides found ways to gently persuade students to keep working. These adults were supportive, and calm, and very careful to interact with students in a way that avoided embarrassing them in front of their peers. When a student's attention strayed from his or her work (which was often the case), these teachers used gentle interventions to refocus attention back to the task at hand.

During one math class, I watched as a student left his desk to go bug another student. Like a fly from nowhere landing on your arm, the teacher's aide was

immediately at his side. With few words, she deceptively distracted him with an affectionate hug as she walked him back to his desk. He quietly resumed his work, and almost imperceptibly, a confrontation was avoided. Without this gentle manipulation, this student's errant energy might have provoked a larger conflict requiring a stricter intervention. In fact, the word 'energy' often emerged as a metaphor for the goings-on in each classroom, where student and teacher 'energies' were continually circulating in highly interconnected and interdependent ways.

Teacher: "They're like an engine, when it's not running, you give it a push, then you get it going".

*Joannie: Do you think the teachers here help to give kids hope?*

Student: Yeah, they won't let kids um, think that they can't do it. They'll - they'll change their mind - like they - 'cuz they, they give the kid an extra boost.

Student: Yeah, like I don't really see any of the teachers getting mad. I just see them trying to discipline you…in a way, too, but. I don't really see them having negative energy.

Student: They show, the staff show a lot of affection and support and a lot of what's it called. I can't think of that word now. A lot of, what's it called when you're always cheering someone on? *(...encouragement?)* That's it. A lot of encouragement. Kids need, to me, in my eyes, it can be the most ugliest thing in the world, and your teachers will somehow find beauty out of it. No, but seriously. They

can make the most stupidest, ugliest picture, and those teachers will always find something in there that is beautiful.

Particularly noticeable to some students was the effectiveness of humor as a means by which some teachers refocused or manipulated a student's energies. Just like the exchange of status details created the rhythms of each morning staff meeting, humor and playfulness were also commodities to be distributed by teachers throughout the school day. In describing the 'jokes' and 'joking around' that gets everyone laughing, students spoke of situations where angrier classmates would lighten up and start laughing at/with the teacher.

Student: Cause humor is the way…if you give him humor and you make him laugh then, he'll open his ears up, but if he's all mad, he's not going to listen, *(yeah)* I see that as a technique that the teachers use that works really well.

Teacher: (from field notes) "Put something else on… (she yells across the gym floor, in response to the loud, misogynist music blasting from the tape deck)… Mary had a little lamb."

*Joannie: And what does Peter (a teacher) do that you really like?*

Student: Well he's, he's like always funny and nice. He changes something bad into good. Like, like say if a kid never gets - like say if a kid's really hyper an' he gets kicked out, so it like it's his fault, right. But Peter, Peter will like, uh…make it into a like a funny thing so the

kid doesn't have any like bad feelings about it. Yeah, an' the kid's not even mad when he comes back.

Student: Hmm. Most of the time they have a … enthusiastic face, I guess. Hmm, I guess when, I don't know. They make nice jokes that are really funny and when the kid's like mad, that they'll make a joke that doesn't make the kid even more mad, it's just one that'll make everybody start laughing.

Of course, this is not to suggest that teachers were always supportive, nor that they were the only ones who needed to conform to the culture of the "contact zone". Students were also orienting themselves to the ways and habits of each teacher, a skill that was not necessarily evenly distributed among the population.

Student: I can tell soon as I walk into a class how that class is going to be?

*Joannie: How can you tell?*

Student: Just the way teachers are acting. Like (one teacher), when s/he's in a bitchy mood, I can walk in, I can tell it's going to be a helluva' class cause when (that teacher's) bitchy I'm bitchy and I can't do any work, I get kicked out, I can just tell that's the way it's going to work. Cause sometimes teachers go on these big power trips. They think just cause they're teachers they can kick me out. They always do it. Cause it's always the big power trips.

Student: … it's maybe just the small class, but that they (the teachers) get to know the kids too, so the kids get to know them too. The kids, they don't feel, like - like: "Oh, this teacher's all mean an'

> everything." The teachers will actually talk with the kids. And some will like – (I) hate to say it, but like this one teacher, but - but they talk with that teacher more than they would talk in the normal school to a teacher that they, like, really like probably. They, like communicate more. 'Cuz the teacher - that - I guess, uh teacher proved to them that they um, that they uh, can be trusted.

Of course, all the training and tricks and all the trust and tolerance does not always work, and when students didn't or couldn't perform "as students", when their resistance was too disrespectful or their actions threatened the safety of themselves or others, they were sent out of the class. When this happened, treatment center staff met with the student to work through the issues and prepare him or her for a return to class. Some days were more difficult than others, and the energy level in the school could be so negative that there were fewer students in the class than sent out. Such was the nature of the place. Despite what could at times be a 'revolving door' into and out of the classroom, all of the subtle and not so subtle teacher practices contributed to the primary goal: to keep students performing as 'students', however that performance was defined.

***The "conversion experience"***

Although Kauffman and Hallenbeck (1996) suggested that special education teachers needed 'training' to work with difficult students, some teachers will be more effective than others. What seemed evident in my conversations with both students and staff was that it was the personality of the teachers that mattered, and how they oriented themselves to their students. And for some, it was the school that

transformed them as teachers, not the special training they had brought with them to the school.

> Teacher: My first few months here was a shock from my previous schooling experience because I felt that I again could solve the problems myself. I could do a better job of preparing for my lessons so they wouldn't get into each other's face, so they would pay attention, so they would have a good day. And then I realized, well, I'm not God, why do I think I can control some of these things. So once I sat in the corner and told myself that "Look, just love the kids, and if you can't love them, don't be here. And if you can love them, then just enjoy that love and uh, you know, find everything you can positive about them and see what happens, and smile a lot and stop getting so worked up." And that changed a lot.

Speaking to change, I asked a youth care worker who had worked at Macdonald for nearly twenty years "How have the kids changed?" He paused, then thoughtfully responded: "… The staff has changed more than the kids have." They were more willing to work with the students, and not seek out ways for them to fail. I understand this. As a teacher, I too had struggled with ways to manage my students' acts of resistance, an experience I referred to as a "peda/logical conversion" (Halas, 1998). Following on van Manen's ideas of pedagogy as a way of being with students, I was like the teacher who said "If you can't love them, don't be here." My pathway to a relevant and nurturing physical education curriculum for my students involved a lot of trial and error and reflective interpretation of how I could change my practices in

response to how students were presenting themselves in my class. In the next section, I discuss the 'active living' pathways that classroom teachers used as a means to negotiate the "contact zone" more effectively in their day to day efforts to "reclaim" their students as students.

**Part II: Play as a peda/logical tool for negotiating the contact zone**

***Field notes, Wednesday, 12:35***

Teacher's aide (to principal): "Steve got suspended."

Principal (smiles): "Stevie's warming up. Honeymoon's over."

***Field notes: 8:50 am in the gym with the boys:***

Danny breaks out into a run and runs two laps, all the time with a huge smile plastered across his face. Mike (a youth care worker) yells "TWO" as he passes, and counts off each lap, … "7" ….. "10". The energy radiating from Danny's body is almost visible. Soon, it's Jeremy's turn. He's giggling. He touches the wall and runs four laps. "Last lap, Jeremy," Mike yells, before calling everyone over to play HORSE. Whoever loses runs more laps. As the others make the rounds of the gym, Mike wrestles with Danny, he has him down on the ground, then Jeremy, who is kicking him playfully. The kids are so happy. Jeremy "attacks" Shelly (a teacher) from behind, laughing and giggling the whole time. Shelly is very physical with the boys. She is big and strong enough to hold her own, and seemingly very comfortable with all the physical contact. A sign low down on the equipment room reads: A little confidence never hurt anyone.

***Play as a means to ease tensions throughout the school day***

Overwhelmingly, students and staff (teaching, para-professional and child care workers) agreed that Macdonald School could not function as a 'school' without the physical activities offered to students on a daily basis. When I asked what school would be like without a gym, the suggestion alone elicited a collection of exasperated

sighs from staff, feigned anger from students, and in one case, an anxious "nobody would … that wouldn't even be allowed, you have to have a gym in school, right?" from one of the younger boys.

> Student: Probably be like cats scratching, practically. Street words, "bitching each other out." Umm, mad at each other. Tired. Sick of class. Um. I'm trying to think what I would feel. Very, very, very emotionally upset.
>
> Student: Hmm. It'd be dull, and everybody would be getting…like really mad in class and stuff and you'd be all edgy.

In general, students commented that school would be "pretty boring" and kids would get too restless. Youth care workers suggested that students would not be able to cope with a full school day, and many would end up being sent from class (for their negative behavior). One of the clinicians remarked that it "would be a disaster" without a gym and that the place would simply not function. When I asked her to elaborate, she stated that many of the young people at Macdonald are angry, or depressed, or hyperactive, and have a real need for the *stress release* benefits that physical activity has to offer. As another example of the staff members adapting to the 'cultural landscape' of the students, aggression was perceived as part of the tensions that had to be accommodated in each school day.

> Teacher's aide: Not all the kids are pleasant, but mainly they are wonderful, they organize themselves, pick their own teams, they get really physical, get their aggression out, the more violent the better; things that take strength, like a tug of war, is very popular, this year we

do a wrestling game, it's really physical, but supervised, they have so much anger, if they get it out, it's a big plus. When they have a gym period at the end of the class, with kids with ADHD, they get out some energy, realistically, you can't expect a kid to sit all morning . . . it doesn't hurt to have some activity.

According to the teachers, without the playful breaks interspersed throughout the school day, there would be increased aggressiveness and conflicts, an increase in students sent back to the residences for inappropriate behavior, an increase in suspensions, and the thought that, "we'd probably have a lot worse attendance." These kinds of benefits extended over to the treatment center facility as well. With the lunch hour basketball, the conflict issues requiring staff intervention were different (e.g., trying to get students to eat slowly, to brush their teeth), but as one supervisor commented, "the benefits outweigh the problems."

A big part of the lunch hour attraction was that students have increased access to each other, which also means that any conflicts going on in the residence can be brought up in the gym. Yet, conflicts in the gym are often mediated by all the activity on the court; when playing, student energy is often focused upon the game as opposed to each other. Back at the residence, lunchtime becomes a quieter affair, with fewer students getting into trouble. The science teacher who regularly played basketball in the gym at lunch commented that on a regular day, there were as many as twenty students playing at lunch. When I asked him if tensions ever spilled onto the court, his reply was one that for me, summed up the spirit of the place.

*Joannie:* *How often are kids sent out of the gym?*

Teacher: 1-2 times per week, and that might be high. When they are sent out, they lose the privilege for the day (i.e., to be in the gym at lunch). (He laughs, and then adds) … then they have to go outside and play ball hockey instead.

Teachers habitually used the gym to ease the stress in their classrooms, at times closing the books and heading to the gym when things seemed to be going awry. The flexibility of the schedule allowed for spontaneity, and the high energy level of the students, some of whom were regularly medicated for their "attention deficit hyperactivity syndrome," certainly warranted the physical activity breaks. Many students agreed with these perceptions, suggesting that students performed better in class because, after "they go to the gym…then they can sit down and do their work, they're like too tired to like argue with the teachers."

Teacher: I know that there are times when the kids are really…really restless, and things have happened in their lives and in their group homes, et cetera, that we can sense at school, that sometimes we just say, "Let's go out and play baseball." We just go out and spend an hour and a half out on the ball diamond and a lot of those problems disappear. The conflicts seem to go away. In some ways, it uh, it forces the issue with a couple of kids…but they were probably going that direction anyway and maybe it's a good thing that it gets expressed.

According to the life skills teacher, problems between students can sometimes be sorted out on the court, where students can exert their power over others "by being

better at something than the other kid and then that satisfies their need to get that kid as opposed to physically attacking him." The social interactions of competitive sport allowed for this exchange.

***Field notes: Thursday morning 'free time' in the gym***

> We're in the gym where Marilyn (the teacher) is with Judy, Michelle, Angela (another caseworker), and Dolores. I ask if I can get Debra (or did Marilyn suggest?), which I do (once she finishes her last spelling question). Debra and I come downstairs. Marilyn, Angela, and I watch for 2-3 minutes (as the girls volley to each other in a circle), then I join in. Then Marilyn follows suit. The girls are playing very well. Debra volleys to me (this is a big communication, I figure). Judy and Michelle take a few good spikes/hits my way which I dig up. Marilyn plays with poor(er) skills, I don't know whether to correct (her) or not? When she misses the ball, the girls laugh heartily, it's a surprised laughter, not mean-spirited – "Wow, Marilyn can miss too" (is what I see in this). Good for Marilyn for trying – shows her humanness. We play till 9:30, when the girls (except Dolores, who is always smiling), leave for drumming.

***Play as a means to transform teacher – student relationships***

Broken social bonds feed the needs for attachment affecting so many young children and adolescents in today's society (Brendtro & Brokenleg, 1993; Brendtro et al., 1990; Taylor-Dunlop & Norton, 1997; Ellis, 1997a), and for Macdonald teachers, building relationships of trust is central to their efforts to reconnect students to school. An unexpected benefit of the school's active living program that teachers talked to me about was how much 'play' contributed to student-teacher relationships. Many of the teachers perceived play as an opportunity to step out of their authoritarian clothes and participate on an equal level with the students, which contributed positively to their interactions in the classroom

Teacher: Certainly with staff, the staff that is involved with these kids benefit so much in the classroom. Just generally in terms of communication with the kids. Because you're down there *(in the gym)* and you, you've missed three shots in a row and you feel like an idiot and they see you as being human and failing like anybody else, so called failing, taking risks, and uh, that type of thing. And uh, they see you as a person, as opposed to a teacher. And that applies to them too. When I'm involved with them in physical activities, I see them as … as people, as kids, as human beings, as unique characters. As opposed to seven or eight students in the class, someone who talks out of turn or is rude.

When this teacher was "failing like anybody else", what needs to be emphasized is that he was role modelling what Brendtro and Long (1993) call "failing courageously". Like Marilyn in the field notes above, this teacher is "taking risks" in the game, and not giving up when he misses. While re-reading these comments, I was reminded of how teachers had to work each day to encourage their students to take educational risks. As one teacher explained "Kids have poor skills (e.g., writing as a fine motor skill), they can be negative and give up. They've had lots of failure, just trying is important." When teachers moved into an area where they became the ones who may have had poorer skills, they had the context for which to teach a lesson on the importance of trying.

Similarly, the language arts teacher fondly recalled a past dance option, where any students who were interested were invited to leave their classes and meet in the gym for a period of folk and social dancing.

> Teacher: That was great because everybody looked ridiculous together. I think a lot of kids were really hesitant to begin with, especially doing things like the Virginia Reel and doing the Macarena until you couldn't stand it any more, that was completely non-threatening and it was a chance to kind of look and see everybody being silly together.

When I asked her why planning a special activity was important, she replied with an example of a recent tobogganing outing where she was allowed to relax and get to know her students better. "I value very much the chance to get to be with the kids where you're not the teacher, where you're just somebody that's participating in an event." Upon further reflection, she added that the benefits of outside of class activities come full circle. By getting to know students outside of the classroom, teachers could use their shared experiences as reference points in the classroom. As the language arts teacher mentioned,[10] "they've seen you see them" on a different level, whether scoring a goal, or looking ridiculous together in dance class, or feeling "scared" going down on the toboggan together. "It doesn't hurt at all, you know, and kids that might be giving you trouble otherwise, you've connected on a different level."

At lunch hours, the students were often itching to get to the gym or onto the rink to play, and the constant chatter through lunchtime was always, "who's playing

basketball today or who's…(going to play hockey on the rink)?" Participating staff members were often stopped in the hallways throughout the morning and asked if they were playing. Students associate these adults with something they were looking forward to, a part of the school day that was exciting to them. Given that many troubled youth have well-developed (and often, well-honed) animosities toward adults (teachers, authority figures), the lunchtime activities provided the genesis for many positive interactions in the "contact zone," allowing teacher identities to be enhanced in the eyes of many of the students. For teachers, feeling appreciated and liked by the students added a positive energy to the day to day tensions.

> Teacher: I think that to work with these kids, if you're not, if you don't have some feelings, good feelings about yourself, you will soon or you won't last long, cause you have to. They push the issue.

However the activities were organized throughout the school day, the positive student-teacher interactions and the added excitement of going out to play made the active living program an essential ingredient of the school climate.

***Play as a performative aide in the classroom***

> Student: (talking about school in general) I just feel tired an' I feel lazy to go, an' I feel crappy in class 'cuz I'd be tired so I just gotta' skip.

In the first year of my research study, the social studies teacher had begun using the gym as a motivator for students to work in her classes. She explained how many of her students had difficulty with reading and writing, and might have only been expected to do underlining, filling in the blanks, and circling in their past schools, thus having little opportunity to improve. She then described how she allows ten to fifteen minutes of 'free time' in the gym at the end of each class as part of the

daily routine, suggesting that the students struggled less academically with the physical activity break. She pointedly referred to her student Randy, who was particularly amenable to the 'free time' option; he would encourage other students to work (i.e., as a form of positive peer pressure) so that they could all get to go down to the gym at the end of class. As she talked about her students, she produced samples of their work for the past year. In one case, she proudly showed how one student's writing had progressed from larger, erratic printing in September to smaller, more controlled writing in June, which she concluded was "acceptable for school" (see Randy's work, figures 3-1a, b, c, d). She then pointed to another student's work, explaining that this student, Joe, could only print when he arrived at the school and "now he can write" (see figure 3-2). The day treatment worker responsible for intervening with students who have been sent from class agreed that this was a good idea, stating that having a little bit of activity attached at the end of the class was "a great motivator to get kids to sit in their seat and do twenty or thirty minutes worth of work and let's go down and run around for ten."

Interestingly, I spoke to Joe in one of the first student interviews I conducted at the school. Without any prompting, he offered this unsolicited confirmation of the effectiveness of the free time at the end of class:

Joannie: *What do you think of the education you're getting at school here?*

Student: Well, I think it's great. In social studies, like, when I came to this school, I could not hand write at all and uh, I can hand write a page in almost fifteen minutes. It's really good, so when I go

Figure 3-1a). Sample of Randy's handwriting: September

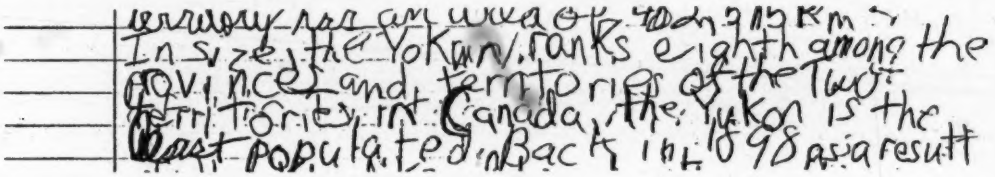

In size, the Yukon ranks eighth among the
provinces and territories of the two
territories in Canada, the Yukon is the
least populated.

Figure 3-1b). Sample of Randy's handwriting: October

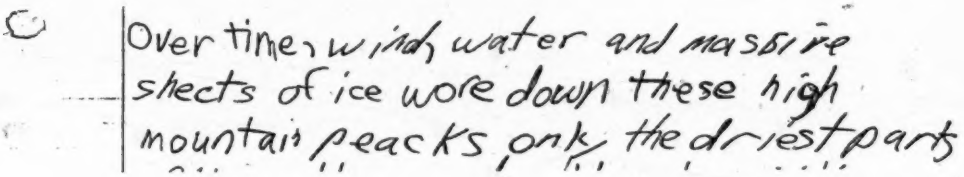



Figure 3-1c). Sample of Randy's handwriting: December

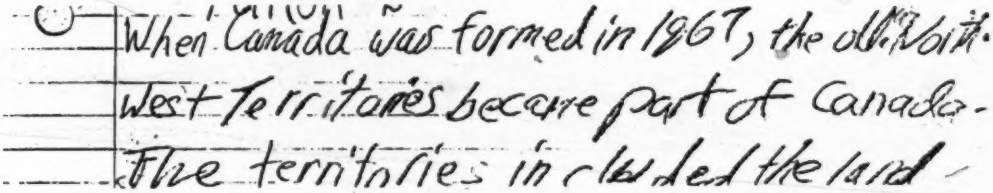



Figure 3-1.d. Sample of Randy's handwriting: June

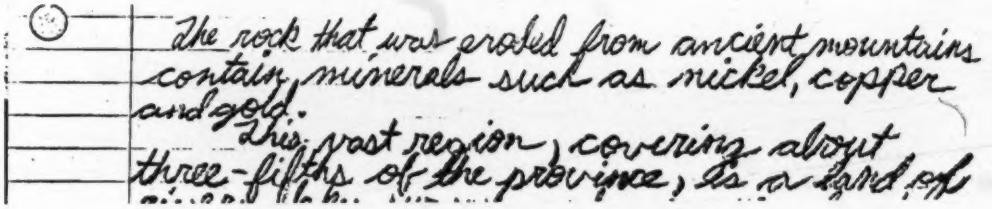
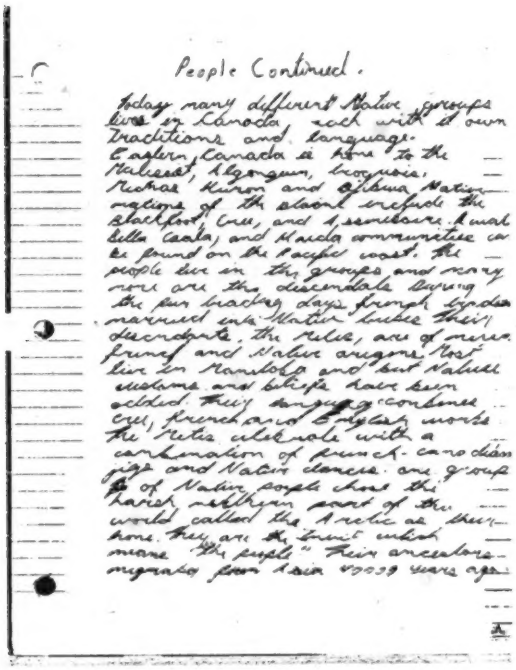

The rock that was eroded from ancient mountains
contain minerals such as nickel, copper
and gold.
This vast region, covering about
three-fifths of the province, is a land of

Figure 3-2: Sample of Joe's handwriting



People Continued.

today many different Native groups
live in Canada each with it own
traditions and languages.
Eastern Canada is home to the
Mikmaq, Algonquin, Iroquois,
Huron and Ojibwa Nation
nations of the eleven includes the
blackfoot Cree, and Assiniboine Nuxalk
Bella Coola, and Haida communities ca
be found on the Pacific coast. the
people live in the groups and many
more are the descendants having
the fur trading days through Indian
married into Native tribes their
descendants. the Métis, are of mixed
French and Native origins. Most
live in Manitoba and but Natives
customs and beliefs have been
added their language combines
Cree, French and English words
the Métis also have with a
combination of French-Canadian
jigs and Native dances. one group
of Native people chose the
harsh northern part of the
world called the Arctic as their
home. they are the Inuit which
means "the people" their ancestors
migrated from Asia 40000 years ago

back to a normal school, I'll be able to keep up and that was my main problem. And that's only because I get to go down in the gym, like, it just keeps me going.

While this student's enthusiasm for school and school work stood out from many of the other students, not surprisingly, I certainly didn't hear any complaints from students that there was too much free time at the end of class.

***Play as a catalyst for social development***

On the occasional weekend, Dave, the principal at Macdonald, would bring his own children to play with some of the residents from the treatment center. Describing this as a meeting of "two worlds," he was sure that an outsider would not be able to tell whose kids were whose. "There is something about the notion of the gym and

play that brings everyone down to the same level," he said, rather emphatically. I heard similar comments expressed by a Native outreach worker who, in describing his work to me, stated that "I could see twenty kids play in the playground, in a gym or in a pool, and … it'd be difficult for me to tell which ones were troubled, because when they're there they have a good time." Despite what they both perceived to be the harmonizing aspect of play, i.e., young people with problems can blend into the group, sport was also seen as an environment that could force the issues that young people are dealing with.

> Outreach worker: But on the other hand, on some team sports, I can tell some individuals that are challenged at home, because they're not able to accept certain situations in sport, that someone may be better than you or someone may be, because they're older than you and have more skills, that's the way it goes. I mean, they don't have the skills to accept that.

Speaking to this, it was the principal's belief that there was "no healthier medium than the gym for developing social skills."

The central focus of the active living program at Macdonald was to teach social skills, and the reason this program worked, according to the principal, was that the students weren't just "dumped down there." The language arts teacher reinforced this idea, suggesting that the structures of games in the gym allow for such skills as cooperation and team-work to be taught.

> Teacher: I think really hard to try and replicate in a classroom, because I have tried to do it for years and years, this has nothing to do

with Macdonald, but just forever, but it's that whole team ethic and just working together on something that can happen in a gym, just seems to happen better in a gym, it's really hard, we tend often I think to get back into the competitive aspect of things in the classroom…

As an example of the socializing power of play, a second teacher described how her students' interactions in the gym had evolved over the course of the year, moving from a type of "parallel play" (in basketball) to a student-initiated, game structure.

Teacher: For the first few months of the year, the kids would work on their shot. They would play beside each other like my kids when they were little. They would play side by side, but not together. From January to April, they would ask to play a game and organize it too. Even with only ten minutes, they would want to play a game.

That the students were capable organizers of the games they played was reinforced by a common perception that Macdonald students "make better use of free time in the gym than other kids. They go down there and go." When things did go wrong and conflicts occurred, these became the "teachable" moments that called upon the "gentle interventions" that were spoken about earlier. By encouraging individual students on a regular basis through their involvement in activities, social skills could be developed.

Teacher: A physical activity is a whole lot of life experiences capsuled in a small, short time. In a game, if they get emotional about it, there's a range of the thrill of scoring a goal and then the frustration of being beaten by somebody in the game…the expression of those

> emotions allow a great opportunity for life lessons. In that they often happen spontaneously, and uh, sometimes better, because it's not orchestrated.

In this case, physical activities were used as a primary vehicle for enabling students to achieve some sense of successful social development.

***Sport as a cultural bridge for kids coming into and leaving Macdonald***

Sports were also used as a means of connecting and developing a sense of belonging to help new students integrate into the program when they first arrive at school. For many students, and in particular, those students arriving for the first time in a larger city from the reserve, the transition can be difficult. As one ten-year old Cree student remarked, arriving in this new environment can be a "freaky" experience. A second student recalled how lonely he was for his family and how he thought of going home to ease the loneliness. Many Native students not only leave their families, but they have to adapt to a new home in a new neighbourhood in a large city that is predominantly middle class and white, where practically all the teachers and care givers are also whitestream and different.

Both treatment center and school staff used the activities going on in the gym to encourage students to integrate themselves into the program. New arrivals were never pressured to participate, only encouraged to watch what was going on, with the expectation that the fun would soon draw them onto the court. When I listened to one of the youth care workers describe how he uses the gym as an 'entry point' for students, I was reminded of the day one of my former students first 'entered' onto the scene at Macdonald. This student had arrived from a remote reserve, and in the first

week of school, she had a familiar mix of fear and shyness written across her face. She kept to herself and refused all invitations to join in any school activities. When Friday came, and we had gathered as a group outside for an afternoon game of baseball, I watched her walk out to the field with that same reluctant gait. The entire school was outside, we were an energetic, noisy group, and I guess I expected our newest student to find a comfortable spot somewhere on the sidelines where she could watch unnoticed. In fact, she did this, until the teacher who was pitching called out her name and asked her to grab a bat. I watched as she slowly got up, walked to home plate, positioned herself to the side, turned, and faced the teacher who had called her name. He pitched, she swung, sending the ball into the outfield. She ran to first. She never looked back. She knew what to do.

> Student: Like coming over here and playing basketball at lunchtime. Got to meet more people. When I came here I was with Michael and all those other staff. Like every time I shot, or they shot, they said "nice pass" and that would encourage me to like the sport and all that.
>
> Student: I was embarrassed (on my first day), everybody staring at me, in the classroom, in the hallways. I didn't know how to play basketball, so, one day, I decided to play, cause there was lots of people, I decided to play, it was fun. George took me to the gym, introduced me to a lot kids, Michael asked me if I wanted to play, and I said "sure".

For Native students coming from communities that are different from the city, sports and games might provide a culturally safe (and accepted) space to be, where the

same rules are used to play the same games, providing a sense of familiarity that for some students may be less alienating than a school environment. Despite the lack of sports facilities on many reserves (Reid et al., 1994), playing sports is an important part of the cultural fabric. A female friend from a northern reserve told me that sports can be a good strategy to meet friends and "strut your stuff." Of course, not everyone plays sports or feels comfortable in competitive physical activity environments. But the active living program at the school included a wide variety of choices, including going for walks in the neighbourhood, which one youth care worker signified as a particularly popular activity for some of the girls from the reserve who were curious "just to look at the houses."

Yet, these activities were not absent of tension, which returns us to where this discussion began concerning the problematic nature of cross-cultural schooling. During my fieldwork, I watched as two Native girls from the treatment center sneaked off grounds to go visit a day student who lived in the area. My heart cringed as this day student's foster parent, himself Native, told me how his whitestream neighbours would go outside and bring the garbage containers off the road when a group of Native students passed. Racism is an everyday reality for Native youth in the neighbourhood, he said, reminding me that for those two girls, both from the reserve, their treatment center experience may afford them their first encounter with whitestream Canada, much of which is undeniably racist. I wondered how well the school and treatment center prepared them for those activities?

***Field notes: one afternoon in the staff room***

> A former student has called the school, pleading to be taken back. He's now living with a Native family back on the reserve. Kids in school are calling him

"white" and "apple" and he's been beaten because he's smart. He did really well when he was at the treatment center.

Finally, and as a continuation on the theme of the problematic nature of cross-cultural education, physical activities were also used as a process of integrating students into neighbourhood schools. In what the principal referred to as "bridging", some students had begun their re-admission into the public school system by trying out for one of the community school's sports teams, or taking part on an outdoors' trip at the new school. On these occasions, students were often accompanied by an adult staff member who would stay with them until they felt comfortable to be on their own. Good intentions notwithstanding, I am reminded of Wilson's (as cited in Brady, 1996) summation that school failure is a reflection of society's social and cultural structure and "the failure of the system to accommodate students who come from backgrounds other than that of the mainstream middle class culture" (p.18). For Native and non-Native school dropouts, failure to succeed has little to do with individual attributes (Brady, 1996). A treatment center school that succeeds in meeting its mandate to make students perform as 'students' may have little do with how well that student performs in the dominant, whitestream society. The inevitable tension rises again: by focusing all of our resources on the individual, without addressing the societal issues affecting the individual, we have to ask 'are we reclaiming or reproducing troubled youth?' Or both?

> Principal: The transition of students into our school and their daily programming is a challenging process, but not nearly the challenge our students face when they have to compete in community based schools or the workforce. In the short term we are very successful with our

> students, however numerous factors impact on the success of our clients following their discharge. There have been wonderful stories of success and there have been some sad, tragic outcomes. We continue to be positive in our outlook and our commitment to these young people remains strong; this attitude being critical to maintaining an environment that is healthy for both students and staff.

I have often thought throughout the course of this study, Macdonald is an 'active living' success story, but where's the happy ending?

***Epilogue: teaching as a humbling, playful resistance***

In the conclusion to his ethnographic work, McLaren (1993) calls for teachers to make more use of the liberating power of laughter as forms of resistance. As I waded through the reams of text and field notes, the difference between the type of school that McLaren described and Macdonald was striking. When McLaren speaks of the demonstrative physicality and emotionality of the students when they are on their own turf, images came to mind of Macdonald students entering the school after lunch hour, pushing and shoving each other as they pass, jumping to touch the ceiling, yanking the classroom chairs into their possession, posturing amongst themselves, bugging the teachers, being 'loud', whining, and complaining. And then things somehow calm down. The "streetcorner state" blends into the classroom activity, teachers moving about touching up trouble spots here and there with strokes of encouragement, humor, attention, distraction, and when necessary, sending the student back to the residence. That the teachers are effective has much to do with how they use respect and humility to interpret the cultural landscape of their diverse group of

students and then willfully subvert aspects of the traditional school curriculum by allowing lots of physical activity and games to happen. Given that play is undervalued in Western society what is happening at Macdonald runs counter to the dominant image of what schools should be.

In this story, tensions are inevitable, teachers are not infallible, and play and playfulness emerge as purposeful means to re-circulate more positively all the energies flowing through the school on any given day. While active living is an integral aspect of this program, it is not a panacea for change and/or resistance in every situation nor a recipe for every school. At this time, it is part of the whole of one community, a means by which teachers exercise the power vested in them by the educational authorities, a method by which the "contact zone" is negotiated in daily efforts to reclaim troubled youth as students. Its inherent limitations are something that I, as a physical educator, a citizen of modernity who is constantly pulled toward the allure of 'emancipatory narratives' (Gore, 1993), must struggle not to forget.

*Joannie*: *Yeah. And. I know we talked so much about how important physical activities are to you in the school day...*

Student: ... keeps me active, keeps me going...

*Joannie*: *...yeah, would you say that school activities keep you away from gangs?*

Student: Oh yeah, cause if I didn't go to school, if I didn't go to those, then I'd be out, downtown doing something.

(*yeah?)* Yeah, I'd have to say … that this school has helped me uh… lots.

*Joannie:* *And so, the physical activities that you like so much at school, does that help you stay away from gangs?*

Student: The physical activities? No, I just go to school all around, having fun with the teachers, meeting up with my friends. All everything.

**Post Script:**

***Field notes: (Written on a piece of paper on the staff room wall)***

Friday's professional development day will begin with a walk at Macdonald Park. See you in the parking lot, 8:30 am.

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[1] Macdonald is a made up name, as are all the other identifying features of the school and people in this research story

[2] I adopt *whitestream* from Claude Denis (1997) who uses the term in place of the label 'mainstream'.

[3] According to Foucault (cited in Marshall, Peters & Fitzsimons, 1998), speaking for others in any grand universal manner is an indignity; the role of the intellectual is to work with those who "struggle for power".

[4] By normalized, I refer to Foucault's (1984) critique of normalizing discourses that use the notion of a rationally autonomous universal subject as a reference point from which anyone outside the norm can be defined and excluded. Only after forms of treatment to correct the anomalies can they be included.

[5] I have previously used the term 'peda/logical' as a means to describe how student resistance in the classroom can be interpreted through reflective practice, i.e., as a 'logical, pedagogical' response to the tensions lived in the "contact zone' of the school (Halas, 1998).

[6] The word disorder is also a made up name, and one that unproblematically reinforces a normalizing discourse around the idea of some universal standard, in this case, social behavior in the classroom (Shogan, 1998). Similar to other words used to identify young people who have difficulty in school or society (e.g., delinquent, disadvantaged, at risk), I avoid using the word 'disorder' because of its pejorative nature (Davis, 1996).

[7] Of note, in an in-depth study of recent attacks by private interests (e.g., the corporate sector, right wing political parties) on Canada's public school system, Maude Barlow & Heather-jane Robertson (1994) expose the myth that Canadian society is geared for full employment. Postmodern industrialization demands a structural level of unemployment, for various reasons. When 'privileged' (McIntosh, 1989) whitestream students must compete for service sector jobs below a living wage, what is left over in terms of 'employment' for those youth who have experienced troubled lives? And, as

Adams (1989) suggests, where are the jobs for Native youth, and why are we pretending that education can help Natives benefit from or contribute to whitestream society?

[8] I use the word life experience as an effort to describe how all students at the school were similar in that they had experienced some form of hardship. Given the diverse group of students (e.g., young people from all classes and racial backgrounds attended the school), their life experiences would be acknowledged in a way that, for the most part, disentangled their problems from issues of race, class and other factors. An accepted commonality across all students was that they had *all* experienced difficulty and hardship. Perhaps this was one of the most limiting aspects of the treatment center/school which I do not take up in this discussion.

[9] Teaching metaphor, author unknown (to me).

[10] Connecting outside the classroom was such an integral aspect of this teacher's outlook toward students that she hoped it would be possible to make special efforts to re-arrange her part time work schedule in order that she be present during some of the special events at the school. The school's small size and flexible nature enabled teachers to exercise these kinds of requests.

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## CHAPTER 4

### Twenty four sport stories about shooting hoops

### at the treatment center[1]

**-i-**

**The way Bobby gets to school is through the gym door**

*ring ring ring ring ring*

*Where's the stupid phone?* That's the third thing Bobby thinks of as he reaches down off the bed to where he thinks he left the phone the night before. The first thing he thought of was whether it was Dustin calling. Then he remembered his dad, who was supposed to call a week ago and still hadn't. Maybe his dad had finally remembered.

Bobby is tired and a little hung over this morning. He and Dustin sat up late last night drinking beer till it was all gone. When Dustin left early this morning, he said he was going to score some dope for them to sell. Well, sell a bit, keep the rest. They'd need some cash up front. They hadn't figured that one out yet. Perhaps Bobby's dad?

"Hello…" Bobby says when he finally finds the phone, his voice cracking with sleep.

"Bobby?" the voice says back.

"Who's this?"

"Wakey, wakey. This is Uncle Dave calling. Are you coming to school today?"

"Ugh, I don't know. I'm a little tired." As he says this, Bobby rolls his eyes to the back of his head. School.

Dave, the principal, is sitting at his desk. In the past few weeks he's had to call Bobby three or four times to try to coax him to school. School is the adolescent treatment center down the road from where Bobby lives.

Dave simply replies "Mmm hmmmm…" and waits for Bobby to make the next move.

"Are they playing basketball this afternoon in gym?" Bobby asks.

Dave enthusiastically repeats the question to the phys. ed. teacher who has just passed by his office. As he waits for the reply, Bobby lies back in bed and pulls the covers up snuggly around his shoulders to keep him warm.

"Double header Bobby. Get your shoes on." Dave's a funny guy, and Bobby likes him. But he really doesn't like school. He'd rather just stay in bed.

"I don't know. I'm feeling pretty lazy today," he says, hesitates, then adds, "…yeah, okay. But I'm going sleep a bit longer."

"You'll be here in an hour?" Dave says, pretending he didn't hear Bobby say he was going back to sleep. "Good for you. I'll tell Auntie Mary to expect you. Don't forget to brush your teeth." Auntie Mary's the school secretary. Bobby thinks she's nice too. She's the one who most times calls home for him. He likes it that she never hassles him. When he hangs up the phone he groans, but slowly rolls out of bed. While dressing, he waits for the phone to ring again, hoping it's his dad. Hoping it's Dustin. Hoping it's anybody. But it doesn't ring.

Eventually, Bobby makes his way to school.

-ii-

**period one**

Period one and Sam, the recreation therapist, is in the gym with Timmy doing their therapeutic recreation stuff. They meet, shoot hoops, and talk about what kinds of leisure activities Timmy can do when he gets back to his reserve. Loud rap music is blasting from the tape deck lying on the floor to the left of the basket. They're playing *rez* rap, the Indian take on black urban music, one of the Native parents had explained, "same problems, same situations."

A few minutes later, a teacher peeks her head around the gym door. "Can we join you?" Margaret asks. Behind her are the "home schooled" boys from a local group home. Presumably, fetal alcohol is the emerging reality of what's ailing these fellows, but who knows? A doctor's diagnosis, so difficult to come by, would do little to improve their lives. Going to the gym is one thing they look forward to, once a week, on the day set aside for them. In the morning, when the gym is mostly empty.

Once invited *in*, the boys immediately spread throughout the postage-stamp sized gym with the strands of dust that hang down like dirty icicles from the light fixtures. Rick shoots on his own at the far end. He's tall and engaging, a nice kid, quiet. Peter is also shooting, his big, toothy smile piercing the blandness of the faded yellow walls. Margaret tells him to go do a lay up and he willfully complies. Benjamin, a youth worker from their group home, plays 21 with Andy. Soon it's decided to play 4 on 4, and Sam shouts "suit up." Bodies quickly fall into place. The kids move to either side of the court, they know what to do. These same kids who struggle with simple fractions and the spelling of short words know the boundaries of

the gym, the rules of play, and the strategies of the game. They understand one on one, give and go, and get back on defense. They have a harder time with verbs and pronouns.

The game gets going and there's lots of passing, lots of scoring. Timmy is decidedly lethargic…it must have something to do with yesterday's fight. Peter continues to smile ear to ear. There's also lots of good-natured fouling. Rick used to play for his school team. Andy's the youngest and his skills are very weak, but he's right in there, trying, watching Benjamin to know what to do. On one changeover, Andy bugs Rick all the way down the court, waving his arms frantically, making loud noises, till Rick finally reacts. Benjamin is right there to prevent any escalation. Very good player (is Benjamin), he passes the ball and is great with the guys. Andy swears ("fuck") and goes "Oops". Margaret replies, almost reflexively "It's okay". After about ten minutes of non-stop action, a water break is called and everyone disperses to shoot hoops and wait for the next thing to happen. Timmy's still not himself, and he and Sam leave.

James appears at the door and asks if he can join in. No one bothers to question him why he's not in class, and he takes this as a "yes". He grabs a ball and begins shooting on his own at the far end. As he sets up to shoot, Peter's ball bounces in front of him and he kicks it wildly out of his way. Peter watches this and immediately he explodes. He runs right over to James and pushes him hard in the chest, saying "What the hell, you wanna' go?" Again, Benjamin steps in, this time pulling James back, as Margaret pulls Peter from behind. It doesn't take much effort to separate them. Peter looks at Margaret, and says "If he wished, he could've hurt

me…" then adds, "he's smaller, but can out do me." James goes right back to shooting hoops. After a couple minutes, they're okay. They understand each other.

Benjamin signals to the other boys to go out for a smoke break. Then he talks to Peter. When the others come back in, Peter leaves the gym to get a lacrosse stick. The flow of energy is always changing.

Meanwhile, James is shooting, playing an imaginary game, calling out loud to himself "James Jordan." He passes the ball to Margaret, saying "Margaret, Margaret Jordan." Margaret cheers on each shot of James's, saying "You can do it", it's "James Jordan with the shot." At the other end of the gym, Peter does a run and flip, then playfully jumps Rick in the corner, and they play fight as if they really mean it. But apparently they don't. Yet. Peter is rough. Benjamin watches from the other side, and then looks over at James to egg him on. "You're not going to make that." James puts up one ball after the other from just inside the center mark, a 25 footer on a regular court, a three pointer in this gym. When the ball sinks through the mesh, James goes "Yesssss" and does a dance.

**-iii-**

**Exercising hope: March**

*I ask James what school would be like if you didn't have a gym?*

Whoa. If Macdonald school didn't have a gym, well, first of all, I don't think I'd be going to it because I think that's the most important part about school is to have a gym so that the kids that go to this school that attend it can burn off the energy and have some fun. Have some fun and, uh, like, just to play the stuff that they like to do like, basketball, to have a fun time in school; stuff like that. Yeah. Basketball, like…

I'm in a program where, where I have a checklist for every 3 classes, and if I get 3 good mornings, I get to play basketball in the gym.

It just keeps me going.

**-iv-**

**Teaching Melvin…**

Melvin has just been kicked out of class for bugging another student. His teacher sends him to Bill's room, a "time out" resource room for day students. He's taken his spelling worksheet along with him, he'll have to complete it before he's allowed back in the next class. Of course, he's also expected to calm down and acknowledge the reason for why he's been sent down. That will be Bill's job to sort out. If there's a chance. As Melvin bounces his way into the room, he's met by four sets of eyes that turn to look at him. Overloaded Bill is already dealing with two students who were fighting in the workshop, and adding Melvin to the mix will certainly upset the already fragile, potentially volatile relations in the room. As soon as Bill sees Melvin's curly mop of hair, he asks Jennifer, a volunteer from the local community initiative program, if she can look after him. "Try the gym," Bill says, knowing the space will be good for Melvin. As they leave the room, Melvin excitedly sprints ahead with the happy abandon of a puppy dog unexpectedly let off the leash. Melvin loves the gym. To discover it's empty is like finding an extra prize in the cracker jack box. "Woooowwwww……"

Jennifer gets a ball from the storage room for Melvin, then negotiates a bargain: "You shoot a few hoops, then we fill out the worksheet." Melvin nods his head up and down loosely like those dash board dogs, saying *"Yeah, yeah, … yeah,*

*yeah"* as he simultaneously jerks the basketball out of Jennifer's hands. Inside the gym, he shoots and shoots, running from end to end between baskets. About five minutes into this non-stop activity, Jennifer calls Melvin over to the mat from where she's been watching, worksheet waiting. Melvin says *"Yeah, I'm coming,"* and keeps shooting.

A few more minutes of unsuccessful coaxing and Jennifer adopts other enticement strategies to gain his attention. She doesn't know Melvin that well, but he obviously loves shooting baskets. So, she interrupts his rhythm with questions about basketball. Their somewhat frenetic conversation goes like this:

What is it that makes it so exciting to score a basket? *Hmm, just getting it over the (marker...?) and score a point for your team.* Okay, but who's on your team right now? *Huh, what do you mean?* Right now, who are you playing against? *A ghost* (he smiles). So, you're just shooting by yourself, and it feels good to score, doesn't it? Is that why everybody likes basketball, does it make you feel good about yourself? *Yup.* (then he mumbles, as if to say, *'don't bug me, I'm still shooting'.) I suck at jump shots...* Are you working on them? *Oh yeah (*shoots ... "*aaah").* C'mon, you can get it... (he shoots) ... good shot. Okay, you've had a few shots, you've got to come do a few more questions.

Finally, Melvin sits down beside Jennifer. Okay, question four, what is the difference betwee... (Melvin is sneakily moving his fingers toward the ball again and they both laugh...) ... okay, so ... (Melvin is a bit distracting...) ... you got to work on your jump shot a bit you said, right? Now we have to do a few questions. (*I want to use this*...Melvin says, with a huge smile on his face as he picks up and holds the

ball). How many hours are you willing to put into your jump shot? *I probably, if it were summer, I'd probably go home ... and I'd probably shoot for a bit, and shoot for a lot actually, and then, if I don't get it, I'd just go inside and rest, then come back out and ten minutes later...* (Melvin stares at the ball and starts bouncing it beside him on the floor). When you say "shoot for a lot" how many shots would that be? (Melvin sounds exasperated) *I don't count...* Fair enough. Would it be for like an hour, two hours...? *Yeah, I've been out for that long before.* Now, do you ever put that much energy into your homework? *I don't get homework.* Oh. Okay... Melvin sings, *"yodellayhehoo" (Jennifer thinks to herself,* "I'm losing Melvin...").

-v-

**Shooting hoops at the treatment center**

You go downstairs and it's empty. You take a ball out and bounce it on the floor and the sound rebounds double time in a hollow sort of clarity. bpop bpop. You listen for that familiar sound that says "this one is yours." bpop bpop bpop bpop bp-bpop bpop. Overhead, the basket stands tall. Straight. Never wavering. Steady. You pick up the ball with two hands and, almost unconsciously, hold it in front.

There is nothing but space between you and the basket, a soft kind of emptiness, it doesn't hold you back. In fact, you like it. The farther away you are, the greater the expanse of nothingness between you, the ball, and the basket, waiting, ever present, never judgmental.

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When I was eleven, I could hardly hold the ball. I would shoot from the bottom of my feet and push/pull the ball up with all my might. All clumsy yet

determined and that distance between me and the basket was a million, trillion miles. But other kids like me would stand up close underneath and shoot and I'd watch them. Hold the ball, look at the space between them and the basket and shoot, and, … wait. My ball would clang off the backboard, off the front of the rim, the side, the other side, bouncing to and fro with the rattling tilt of a pinball.

Sometimes, all the ball knew was space. I would shoot and it would float up into emptiness, making no sound, no swoosh, pausing mid-air till it hit the back wall or the roof or just dropped out of nowhere to the floor. I'd go after it as it bounced forward or backward or to the side. Sometimes it'd drop down, hitting another ball, or a foot, or the corner of a bench, and it would arc out across the entire gym, taking off with the force of a loaded spring, landing way out of reach, goading me to chase it down. And I would, bending low to bring it back into my grasp. That ball is more than a checker piece or a bat or a bike. It has a life. A mind of its own. It can do what it wants and it doesn't necessarily listen to me. Yet, without me, it does nothing.

Like a new friend, the more you spend time with it, the more you know its possibilities. You learn to anticipate its moves. Will it bounce here? There? In time, you become master, sliding your own body into place before it even hits the backboard, ready to grab it back and direct it once again into the patterns of your own making. That ball is mine, growing smaller in my hand, conforming like a weathered glove to my palm. It knows me. The good backspin I put on it each time I release it.

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When you're a kid and just starting out, you shoot, almost waiting for luck to carry the ball through the hoop. You try and try and try. Then one day it happens.

You shoot and it goes 'swish'. Hits the center of the rim and drops through the hole, its fall cushioned by the gentle mesh of the net. Swoosh. The ball swirls as it drops down. You move under the basket. Pick it up. Place it back in the palm of your hand and press it forward. Bpop bpop bp-bpop bpop. Pass to your left hand. Pass behind your back. Aaaaagh. It slips away, a lousy friend who never does what you want. You try again. Whoops. Still it won't do as it's told. Again it slips away.

Sometimes you get pissed off. You pick it up, take it back in one hand over your shoulder and whip it as hard as you can against the farthest **wall**. Whap! A round rocket launched. It boomerangs right back at you, stinging your hands with the explosive force you had put upon it. You pick it up a second time and your body whips it even harder against the far wall. WHAP! It comes thundering back again. Errrraaaaaarrrrrrrr. Like a ghost, your anger slips away as you extend your hands to absorb the impact, and turn back to the basket, hugging the ball to your chest. Now it transforms into a friendly orange dog who sticks by you. Next time you shoot, it obediently drops through the hoop. Bingo.

As it drops, you're competent. Skilled. Good. You scored.

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It's easy. But not real easy.

**-ix-**

And you know you're not Michael Jordan. You know you're not the best player. But you close your eyes and you're the "dream team", clock ticking down in the final minute of the final game, and you have the final shot….3, 2, 1, you shoot…..oops, a miss, grab the ball again, dribble into position, ….3, 2,1, you shoot

again, the ball is up, the crowd on its feet, you watch and hear the ball drop through the rim, it's over, you're the champ, the crowd goes wild … yaaaaaaah …….. grab the ball again, this time stepping a little further out, …3, 2, 1, whoops, the ball isn't even close, go get it, …3, 2, 1, shoot…..(it's in the air, ……), off the backboard, … and in. Throw your arms in the air. You are the best. You've won.

And when the game is over, time too has slipped away as you disappear into that soft space that pulls you in like a meditation, eyes focused on the hoop, mind closed off to everything else. It feels good to shoot a ball, to watch it rise softly toward the basket, hear it drop through the mesh, taking with it all that boredom squirreling around in your head.

Dashing. Bouncing off the walls. Going all crazy, chasing down the ball. Maybe you use your body to play, but for some kids, basketball is good for the head.

-x-

**Little big man**

Little Nicholas is just that, little. He's the tiniest kid in the school, yet, come gym time, he runs up and down the court with the best of them. He barely reaches the waist of six foot three Norman, yet he dekes in and out of the action, sliding between bodies moving, calling for the ball, putting up shots to what must seem like the jolly green backboard.

"When I first came (the first day), I didn't know how to play basketball, so, one day I decided to play, cause there was lots of people, I decided to play, it was fun. George took me to the gym…introduced me to a lot of kids, and that teacher Norman asked me if I wanted to play, and I said 'sure'…"

Nicholas scored his first basket on the third day. "It was fun, I got happy, and *Norm* did too …"

Sometimes he feels scared to play with all those big guys. "No one gets along, there's a fight everyday, so when they get on the basketball court it's the same thing. But it's not so bad. Eventually, you can get tripped or pushed…they call a foul. It's fair. Teams are fair, fouls are fair."

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**The best basketball player in the school**

Most kids would agree that Michelle is the best player in the school. She said that Kevin was the best, but Kevin took off last week and hasn't been back since. Bobby is good too, but he doesn't come as often as he used to. Timmy is probably a better athlete, but he's less skilled technically. Even though all his brothers played, he hadn't until he got to the center. He says he got better just by playing more. He had wanted to play hockey, that's his favourite sport and the one he mostly plays back on his reserve. When he saw everyone wanting to play basketball, he decided to practice on his shot. He says that Kevin taught him how to hold the ball. He practiced and now he says he has a good shot. He hopes to get on his cousin's basketball team when he gets back to the reserve. When Raymond arrived, he too hadn't played much basketball. His teacher bet him that he'd love basketball by the time he left the center. He didn't believe her, so he took the bet. He soon learned that everyone was playing, and Timmy and Bobby taught him how to shoot and do lay-ups. Like Bobby, Raymond is tall. Bobby can dunk the ball now, and that's just cause he's grown.

In yesterday's class, there was a fight when Timmy sucker punched Patrick, who is the most recent arrival at the residence. A new pecking order is developing, which probably influenced the fight, and which will probably be influenced by the outcome of the fight. These kids have to re-establish themselves every time there is a change in their living conditions, which happens often. They are always in the process of finding their place.

But Michelle. She's different. Michelle's the top player now but outside of Macdonald, things will be different. There aren't as many teams for girls where she's from, and it could also hinge on staying in school. That's a challenging prospect for her. Michelle doesn't know how she got to be so good, only that she learned how to shoot from watching other kids who were better than her. When Michelle's on the court, she's in control. She dribbles up to the edge of the perimeter, calmly says "excuse me" to the teacher who's watching, then shoots. She just misses the shot by centimeters, and waits as one of the younger boys runs after her rebound and dutifully passes it back to her. Her skills are her currency. She plays every lunch hour till she gets kicked out for swearing. She gets herself kicked out lots lately. No one is sure why. Sometimes she speaks in Cree, which at times can make her mostly white teachers feel uncomfortable. Especially when the other kids laugh, knowingly. She likes it best when there's a whole bunch of people watching, when they cheer her on or something. At lunch time, when the are lots of people cheering, she says she *feels* it. Michelle's the one who says basketball is easy, but not real easy. Just like watching her mouth and staying in school.

**Basketball philosophers...**

The school psychologist has two of the boys in her office. She's trying to decide if their Ritalin is helping or not. She's using counselor tricks to get the boys to open up and talk to her. She starts by asking them about the sports they play. The other day, she had asked Melvin, one of the more energetic young students at the school, why basketball was fun? Melvin responded that it was "good for the head". Today, she asks the two young boys in front of her to explain what that means, and they each search for a language to express themselves:

Eddy: I don't know. Just, just fun, I guess. It's fun for me anyway. Probably cause it helps you maintain your self-control physically. Cause if you want to score a basket, you have to like practically aim or it's a fluke.

Jeff: Cause if you enjoy it and stuff, and you think it's, well when you know it's good for you uh, and everybody ... you seem to have a good time there...it sort of kicks in after awhile, and you start feeling it... feeling like it's... hmm, I don't know, cause you feel good when you're all...when you're doing stuff like that. So you want to feel good longer, I guess, that's I don't know.

Eddy: Yeah, cause I can slow down sometimes. Like I don't get hyper, like I don't over...excite, I don't get kicked back any more. Because I slow down when the teachers give me a warning or something.

Eddy: Yeah, and when other kids start laughing at you. That's wrong, a wrong energy or something. And then, or if they come in and they start saying "hey uh, Eddy..." and so and so and you start talking about video games and stuff, that's a good energy. Yeah. And then when I go to the gym, it's like a reward

sort of thing. Because I can't sit still and do work for like a long time. I don't know. My knees if I get this energy thing, it's that I'd be moving like this (he fidgets to show what he means)…

Jeff: Yeah, energy … comes out and then after you … sort of like, all, like feel …you're all, lose all energy and that's good cause then you feel calm and relaxed like half an hour later. Yeah, cause then like it takes a while for me to get more, get all hyped up and energized, for another thing.

Jeff: Yeah, yeah you hafta' give an effort. It keeps you...from, like I dunno', like from being off in - in like nowhere. Just like...I dunno'. Helps you concentrate probably.

Eddy: …like 'cuz once you like it it's like fun all the time. 'Cuz we come back, you've let all the energy go and you just, like, n' you realize that you have to do work, so instead of feeling all cold like you do in the morning, it's like after gym you feel all nice and warm and stuff. Yeah - well, yeah it does help them. 'Cuz it sort of gets your mind away from everything else, but - but in a way, like it sort of puts the anger away or something –

Jeff: - 'cuz, like when you're angry and you play in the gym, and you try and play in the gym, that playing in the gym puts away all the - all the force that you - that you were angry with into just, like maybe getting a basket in the ball - like in the, well ball in the basket or something.

Eddy: Yeah, if you focus it positively, uh and you get like a couple of baskets, a swish or something -- that energy turns into - that bad energy turns into good energy when you - as soon as you realize that swishes are good you got like,

you don't need to be angry at anything else, 'cuz you just got a bunch of good shots.

**-xiii-**

**Exorcising anger**

Kevin is pissed off at everything. He says he only comes to school to play basketball. That if Macdonald didn't have a gym, he wouldn't be coming. All that negative energy wouldn't be burned off in the right way.

James agrees. Says you gotta' watch who you're sorta' roughing around with. He's talking about his friend Troy who gets really hyper. Sometimes it gets into a fight. Yesterday, he says, "We got into a fight."

"Troy was bugging me, really badly. And I go, 'okay, we'll play a game and if, if I win, we'll be friends, if we don't, we'll still be friends but, we'll be all mad at each other' and then it sorta' turned into fun, it was like … 'ah right on, good game' (emphasis). I kinda' started it off like, talking to my enemy, 'ahh right on, good game', and so, by the end of that game, we were talking and having fun. So, that's a way…basketball helps your anger."

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**… smoke break**

The boys collect themselves off grounds near the creek, where students go to smoke at lunchtime. Usually, there are more day students than residents cause the residents aren't allowed to smoke, but they do anyway. The staff are allowed to smoke, but not the residents. That's why they sneak off, then get back in time for basketball in the gym. James asks Thomas what he likes best about Macdonald.

"The food," he says, referring to lunch time. "When they have fries."

"What do you hate?"

"They need a drink machine."

"How long you been smokin'?"

"I don't know. Since I was nine. I used to buy a pack one day and it'd be gone the next day."

"Pack a day, man…"

"It'd be gone the next day and I'd buy another one."

"How much you smokin' now?"

"Not that much cause I'm in a group home. I forgot how to inhale. We went for a walk and we lit up a smoke and I forgot how to inhale and I started coughing."

"All that smoke does to me is hurt my eyes," James says.

"I kind of enjoy it as it's going down, it's in your tongue (laughs). Yeah … (he drags on his cig' and sucks it in really fast), makes me slow down, ha, and the urge is, try not to cough or anything, …"

"You know what smoke does to your lungs?"

"Yeah. Makes them black and make them bleed."

"Everybody's smoking now. I don't know why."

"Haaa… be cool," Thomas says with a forced gesture.

Timmy walks up and asks if he can bum a cig'. James gives him a drag from his smoke, then adds "I thought you went to that track meet this afternoon."

"That's tomorrow…." Timmy replies, then adds, "but I know I won't win because there's a lot of white boys and they're faster than natives."

"Why do you say that?"

"The natives smoke too much."

"Yeah," James adds, "that's why I'm not fast anymore. I don't know. I don't, I don't think, like I know it's affecting me and, but I don't think it's to a point now where it's actually really affecting me physically. Cause I've always been like that, not able to run really that far and, the farthest I ever ran, that was when I was smoking, so…"

James butts out his smoke and heads back to the school with Timmy for a game of basketball. "You coming, Raymond?"

"Nah, I don't play basketball."

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**Lunch time on the court**

Ron goes over George's back to block the shot (both are staff members), he stuffs the ball and it bounces wildly out of bounds.

Gloria, the only girl who showed up today, is right in there with the guys.

Norman (the six foot three teacher) touches Nicholas's shoulder to congratulate him as he walks by under the basket. Nicholas had just dribbled down and made an excellent pass to a teammate who had scored.

Bobby pushes off the staff member, no foul is called.

Nicholas calls for the ball, then gets a basket (everyone on the court and watching from the sidelines goes "*ohhhhhhhh*"; Nicholas is tiny, and eleven years old).

Nicholas shoots on the basket again and misses big time, grimaces and gets right back on defense.

Bobby makes a nice basket off the backboard. He had dribbled in…

*On a scale of 1 – 10, how physically fit are you?*

I guess 8.

I'd say I'm an eight and a half.

Seven-eight.

I would say I'm a 7, no one's perfect.

1 –10, probably a 9.

I'm about a ten.

I participate in everything, I'd say it's about 9.

Eddy dribbles then passes. No ball hogs on this court (is it just today or what gives?).

Play temporarily stops to question a foul. "Off who?" and the problem is quickly settled.

Norman stuffs Gloria's pass and the next shot is in for a basket.

Ron and Eddy bring up the ball. Eddy shoots and misses (Norman had encouraged him, saying "put it up").

Gloria brings the ball down and scores. Then steals the ball off another player.

Six foot two Denny, the family volunteer coordinator, makes a mistake and says "Sshhhh, no laughing."

James gets the rebound and scores.

Nicholas sneaks under the basket and almost scores. It's very funny.

Norman stuffs Ron (who says these big guys aren't playing for real?)

Nicholas says, "Fuck" and the staff reply "*Nicholas…*"

James scores a basket and is fouled by Nicholas. He looks pissed. Timmy scores.

(Norman, Ron, and George, the staff members, have volunteered to play basketball *every* lunch hour, *every* day of the school year.)

Nicholas misses a pass. When it bounces off the wall, he picks it up and throws it back harder at the wall. He's told to settle down. He comes off the court and picks up his cap, saying "Fuck", looks (real) mad (i.e., a very expressive face), and walks out.

*How skilled are you?*

Ten.

Well, we got pretty good players, and we call ourselves the dream team, and so… Probably about 8 or 9.

Good.

Patrick, the new student, asks if he can replace Nicholas (after being hit yesterday in the fight, he's back at it today).

Ron does an 'up and down' and says "Sorry guys".

Patrick tries a step back hook shot, misses, but laughs and no one bugs him. Staff say "Nice try, Patrick".

shot shot shot (key: small court, lots of action, lots of contact with the ball)

Ron blocks Bobby for Gloria to shoot. Bobby goes "Ah, that's sick."

Denny stops to fix his glasses. He's asked "What is it, glasses?" When he replies, "Yeah", one of the kids on his team goes "ah ha" (i.e., loudly mocking him). He ignores the taunt and tells everyone to keep going and the game continues without him.

*How well, on a scale of 1 to 10, do you get along with everyone else on the court?*

I dunno', about seven, or a six. Six or seven.

Oh, I'd say, about an 8, because some kids I have arguments here, yeah, pretty much.

Three (no hesitation).

James calls out loud "Patrick" for the pass, then "Gloria."

Patrick dribbles behind the back and someone says, "Nice move". Then, "Go get him, go get him Patrick."

Last minute is called. Last basket.

Everybody shakes hands after the game.

Eddy has a sprained finger. Eddy plays with the ball, and Norman waits. Eddy is passing the ball between his legs, i.e., practicing.

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Troy faithfully takes his "meds" as part of his daily school ritual. It wasn't until he went on an overnight winter camping trip that his teachers realized there might be other factors involved in his "pervasive hyperactive and impulsive behavior." After requesting a third cup of coffee one morning, he had tried to persuade Margaret that he needed his "caffeine" fix! He explained how his daily pre-school breakfast included two or three instant cappuccino coffees or hot chocolates to go with his *co-co something or other* sugar covered cereal which was always followed by a daily visit to the street corner store for a very large, very caffeine filled coke. By the time he would reach school, his body was infested with sugar and caffeine. He never complained

about having to take a pharmaceutical drug three times a day, and no one seemed to know how many others were washing down their Ritalin remedies with caffeine and a coke.

This lunch hour, as he bit and suckled on the straw of a pop between turns on the pool table, he explained what he thought about having gym everyday…

"Well, I wouldn't say... hmmm… it's alright, but like there's barely like...there's no one cheering like 'cuz everybody's playing, but … At lunchtime when, um, you're playin' basketball, it's alright, but you gotta', you can't forget 'bout like some people who like tease people an' that."

He prepares himself to take another shot. Bends low over the table, eyes the far pocket, smoothly pushes the tip of the cue through the bridge of his fingers. "Yeah. I've never been a basketball player really. In fact the teacher at this school betted me a million dollars that I'd love basketball by the time I leave, and I said I don't think so. I never play basketball. I don't... I go play pool at lunchtime."

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**Co-ed phys. ed. in the afternoon**

When basketball is mentioned, Bruce says, "I'm not playing," and Yvonne chases Earl. The teacher replies to a second student who doesn't want to play saying, "You're such a good shooter." He complains about his ankle, and wanders around the periphery of the new game being organized. When Yvonne flies by Melvin, he yells "Who hit you with the ugly stick?" She doesn't hear. The teacher does. She calls out to everyone to sit down in the corner where most of the students are already gathered on the mat. "Everybody sit and relax for a second."

Soon after, two captains are picked, a younger boy and a girl (Michelle and Albert). The teacher tells them that they get two picks and "We finish the rest." There is lots of talking, and the noise reverberates loudly as the gym's acoustics are poor. One student, who was nearly in a fight at the start of class, still looks mad, and his arms are folded. When Melvin is picked, he says, "No way" to his team, but goes anyway. No one seems to have a problem with how the teams are picked. Though Michelle won't be as happy; she prefers being "picked" to being captain.

The game begins quickly with a jump ball, and then the teacher and teacher's aide stand to the side and talk, watching the play. The near fight that happened earlier is explained as "Angela had tripped over Jeff's feet." Albert walks up to the teacher and makes like he doesn't want to play. The teacher says, "You're the captain, they need you." Okay, the captain is short, young, and seems lost in the middle of the court. He doesn't get the ball much, and he and another one of the boys seem to be the two who never touch the ball. The other player keeps playing, while Albert looks less interested, less involved. Bruce sits off to the side, making fart noises to entertain himself. He says he's too bruised to play.

The students referee themselves within the game. The play goes up and down, with one basket scored at each end. Michelle brings the ball down and shoots the next basket. She prefers playing basketball with the younger boys in the school, which is the new structure for physical education this year.

Eventually, Albert comes to the side saying, "I'm no good," at which the teacher replies, "No, you're the leader, you just walk around being the leader." Finally, the other player who doesn't get the ball, asks "How much minutes are left?"

The teacher says a few minutes. Then he asks, "Who's winning?" She replies as she always does, "It's a tie."

The play continues at a good level. The girls and boys are putting in an equal effort. Yvonne is very good on defense, Michelle is the best player on the court. Michelle swears, and immediately says, "Sorry." The teacher and teacher's aide comment that this is Michelle's habit. Nicholas comes down the court and does a reverse lay up behind his head to score a basket. (… what's going on here, he's eleven years old, how'd he learn that?) Albert finally gets the ball, and shoots, almost scores. His teammate Earl gets the basket and Albert claps. Michelle comes down court using a reverse dribble, and passes off. She dominates the play on her team.

The teacher calls out the last minute of the game. As the play ends she says, "Good game, you guys." Michelle keeps shooting with Yvonne and Jeff. Everyone else runs out of the gym. Jeff still shoots. The teacher turns the lights out and he gives up the ball, which bounces away. The teacher asks him to get the ball for her, and he does. She says thanks. She then asks Jeff if he has a shirt to change into because his is drenched. It is 1:15 and the gym stinks from perspiration.

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**Boys talking about the girls on the court**

'Cuz the girls there, they come - they come to the gym all fancy, dressed up an' all that. They wear these boots.

They don't come with gym shoes. They can't - they can't play in the gym with shoes...boots on.

Some girls do come with shoes, and they play basketball. Yeah, some play some games.

*Does it help that the phys. ed. classes are separated into older boys together and younger boys with the girls?*

Yeah, the older boys from the girls cause the boys always try and impress the girls, most the time.

Well, some girls, they um, like they, they think it's a, it's a game right that they don't take it seriously, like, they throw the ball away to the other team, like some girls they just do that to annoy, the boys, and, "Yeah, cause I like the way you shoot, man", so, but most of the time they don't end up playing which, like, sometimes I wish they were playing cause, some of the times those, the girls that are really good passers, like, they know the passing, they know where to go so, some of the girls are actually okay to play basketball. Like Rita, she knows where to stand and I don't know where she got it from, just, I don't know like that, like where to go … places like sometimes I just run all over and, so…yeah.

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**One girl talking about other girls, boys, jail, basketball and gangs**

Well, life's not a game you know. But these girls just don't understand what's the difference between friendship touching and I-want-to-get-to-know-you touching. Like you know, you'll just know. And trust me, some guys you just don't want to get involved with.

The guys can be really rough. Like they take this game, especially basketball, they take this game really serious. But they also encourage each other, hey, and they

really play good as a team. No, I've played with them sort of, I just stood around there, I don't like playing basketball, I like watching, but I don't like playing it. Because even though I don't really like playing basketball, I remember .... we used to go sometimes, not really playing, just go down and playing basketball.

Yeah. That's how those guys are in the gym because they think they're all ruler of the gym. Because I remember when Kevin, that guy who just walked in, Kevin, ... because we're betting money, eh, he's like, "If I don't get this shot in, I owe you two bucks." So he owed me something like eight bucks, okay, and then he – "Okay if I get this shot in, we're even." I said okay, so he'd get the shot in, and he's okay, we're even. So it's like, okay no more betting, then he comes up, "Okay, just one more, if I get this shot in, if I get this shot in you owe me two bucks, if I don't I owe you." Well, he didn't get it in, so he was whining and complaining, so he went and told Timmy, the big basketball star and Timmy goes, "Okay, half - if I get it in, no one owes anything. If I miss, I'll give you two dollars from my pocket." I said okay, either way I'm not going to lose. So he gets it in and we're continuing. And I'm taking shots, and Kevin asks, "How come you never take shots?" I said I've been shooting this ball, you're just too busy doing your own thing. And he goes, "How would you know?" I said because all the time you're doing shots and if you're asking me to do them and asking me how come I don't do them, you're obviously not watching right? He goes, "Well, whatever, Ange." And then I took a shot and I was really close. He goes, "Ha, can't even go farther back." And I was like, it doesn't matter where you shoot the ball from, if it goes in. And he says, "Oh, you throw like a girl." Well, I'm a girl. Sometimes they feel too big and strong. It's an image society gives, that guys

are stronger, then they grow up thinking that way. But I know there's guys out there that are my age and I can kick their asses. It's not gender that makes you strong. It's your own body that makes you strong.

I started off this year. I went to the jail. I wasn't going to school lots, and I don't know, I got involved with some pretty bad shit and then I was in the juvenile center. You really learn to appreciate time. It goes so fast. I did six months in there and then I got out and I came back here. I just got out two weeks ago. Firstly, I hate waking up early. I just hate it. And you know, there's times when I feel 'aw, man, I've gotta' go to school', and I just don't want to, but I guess I got probation if I miss school, too much of it, I'll get breached, but also I don't want to be sitting there like my uncles and all that and they're drinking all day, they're on welfare. You know, I want a job, I don't want to sit there and be unemployed for half my life. And plus people on welfare just cost everybody else. Well, I want an education even though how much I hate school, but you just need it to survive.

In jail I used to play basketball. But I'm not good at it any more. I just sit there and try to get the ball and pass to someone. This one time I scored on ourselves. I'm not good at basketball. I just sit there and try to bug people. Not to intimidate them but you know, lose their concentration so they'll lose the ball so I just go and stop in their face and make faces sort of thing. Cause you can just be a goof. And people don't really care, cause it just looks like you're playing. And in basketball you work really hard at that game.

And they were having a lot of programs for those gang members, they were trying to get those community centers together and they are putting in teams, all those

people they had basketball teams and everything, and they were trying to put in physical activity stuff for those people. I don't know, because those kids, you know, they can get into those sports and eventually realize you can't be sitting there smoking the rest of the day and playing basketball the next day, you're going to burn your lungs, and you know, eventually you might go to school and stuff.

To them, all they think is oh yeah, it's so cool, I'm hanging out with the gang, and I'm so cool because I've got weed in my pocket and a beer in my hand. It's like, god, they sit there and they glorify it but they don't know until they're right caught in it, they just don't know. I don't want to sit there and nag at them because I remember when I was hanging out with gangs and all those warnings at me, I wasn't going to listen.

So there's no way to talk to them, they've got to learn the hard way sometimes. When they learn it the hard way, they still feel there's nothing else and that's what they keep doing. But you know, I'm glad because I had a really supportive family, like my mom really helped me out, and my sisters and I had some friends that weren't involved in that, and that really helped me out. I'm lucky that I stopped now because I know if I didn't stop now I would've kept going and I wouldn't last my month and I don't want to go back to jail.

There's nothing. Everyone's going to need someone. You can talk to them, you can lecture them, you can give them information on it, the more you try to stop them the more they want to do it. I mean, not all kids go with gangs, a lot do. The one, I think the one that doesn't choose to go with the gang is stronger than the one that does, because they don't… they're strong and they walk away and say, I don't need it.

They need to be part of the same thing. They have their own style, they can be themselves, they don't have to. If they've got a poor attitude about school and life and everything else, then how are they ever going to make it? You're going to hate your work, you're not going to sit there and you love it, you're always going to hate something in life.

Because most of these kids, now they're here, they haven't - most of them haven't been around their family, their family drinks, and there's family problems, and they don't see that, they've been in and out of group homes and foster homes, they don't feel that love. When they just stop they actually think about what they're going to say first and they actually think of – 'okay, if I say this, this is going to happen, someone can interpret it this way', like when they just really think about stuff. I don't know. It's hard to define it. They don't think everything is a big game any more.

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**Yvonne, the girl who loved school**

It's the last class on the last day of the school year, and Yvonne wants to get her report card. She's really excited. And proud. At the beginning of the year she had no intention of going back to school. She's sixteen and no longer has to. But when she came to Macdonald, her attitude changed and now she's going to get course credits. As she said, she could hardly believe it. When she hears the students leaving the movie next door, she races out into the hallway and to her homeroom.

Just before she left, I asked her about the game she had been playing at lunch hour. She loves playing basketball. She was the only student who was 'really' playing defense on the court.

*Hey Yvonne, how does being physically active help you?*

I don't know. Makes, it gets…I'm always happy whenever I get to play basketball, and sports. Well, it helps, when I get a basket it makes me feel good cause I know I'm helping out my team. And I feel good for getting the basket.

*What's the best part?*

Being with people that you like, trust, and no one hurts you when they're playing.

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*Anybody not take part?*

No. Everybody plays. Except Bruce.

*Do sports keep kids away from gangs?*

Yeah, I think sports keep kids away from gangs, but there's a lot of kids out there who are in gangs and play a lot of sports, like basketball.

*Is basketball a gang sport?*

Yeah, sometimes. Like a lot of gang members play basketball when the cops are looking for them or something.

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**Nice kids play basketball too**

Whenever the forty-eight year old female staff member waits for the ball under the basket, Simon playfully holds her hands, preventing her from getting the pass. "C'mon, old lady," he smiles as he gently holds her back from the ball. It's all part of Simon's schtick. And the staff love him for it. He makes the time together more

interesting, more fun. He initiates this physical contact that is both gentle and accepting, playfully teasing or joking. His favourite ploy is to tap the teacher on one shoulder and then hide around the other shoulder as the teacher turns to look.

In the day to day unfolding of the many lives lived in that busy, dungy gym, Simon's presence is an asset. Simon is also unbeatable from one spot just off to the side of the basket. He can sink anything from there, each time gesturing with his hands the picture perfect follow-through after the shot. The ball goes "swoosh" and drops. The gym not only gives Simon something to do, it's something he can do.

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**Exercising hope**

*May:* On James's first day of school, he dragged his feet across the field that led to the treatment center, walking slow, looking mean. He's been a ward of the social services all his life, and he can count off five different schools he's been to in the past while. Now he's been placed with a Native foster parent who takes on Native kids who are in trouble. For the first time, James is learning about his culture. Because he's at this foster home, he can go to school at the neighbourhood treatment center.

*March:* James loves living with his foster parent. He loves school. His teachers are bragging about him. What a success. James feels this success too. He says for the first time he can hand write. He attributes much of his handwriting success to being able to go to the gym and shoot hoops. It's motivating.

*June:* James has missed a few days of school. His foster parent has introduced him to Sundancing, and he's really excited about that. He still likes school,

says school helps to keep him away from gangs. But says it's his foster parent who's made the big difference in his life. He's got his culture back. Not to be racist, he says, but he tried Christianity and there was something missing. He wants to go to high school next year. Take woodworking.

*October:* James says he doesn't go to the gym as much anymore. He's only at Macdonald in the mornings. Afternoons he goes to a high school in the community. He wants to do well so that he can go there full time. Sometimes he still goes to the gym to shoot hoops, but it doesn't seem to be as important to him. He says he can't really see himself "being angry anymore." He loves his life. He likes his woodworking teacher. He knows exactly where to go and how to ask for a late slip at the front office.

*February:* James is now full time at the high school. He says phys. ed. is the same there as it was at Macdonald. He's still living with his foster parent. He wants to be known as a kid who's proud of his culture. When he's dropped off at school he immediately migrates to the kids hanging around just outside the fence, smoking. Says he's been through a lot of changes in the way he thinks in the past year, "I like learning now. I'm fascinated." He wants to have a happy life.

*May, one year later:* James is riding his bike down the road that crosses in front of the school. He stops to chat with a former teacher. He gives her a hug then gives her an update on his life. He failed all his classes at the high school, and he's not in school anymore. But he wants to get his grade twelve. Pretty soon, he'll be on Independent Living. He can't wait for that. Call me, he says. He's still smiling. He's still at his foster parent's.

A year after he was discharged from Macdonald, Bobby returns to visit the school. As he walks through the door, he can hear the voices of kids' playing and balls bouncing. He immediately re-traces the steps that lead directly to the gym. It's free time at the start of the afternoon phys. ed. class. He picks up a ball that rolls by his foot and shoots, saying: "Oh. It feels so good to shoot a ball." He goes for the rebound, then shoots again. He looks over at whoever wants to listen and says, "I haven't shot a basketball since I left."

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[1] A version of this chapter has been submitted to the Sociology of Sport Journal.

## CHAPTER 5

## Engaging troubled youth in physical education: a busy, safe gym where the f** word is allowed

***Physical education on a hot afternoon at the adolescent treatment center***

It's five minutes into the afternoon timetable, and two homeroom classes empty out for their phys. ed. class. In a spirited rush to get to the gym, Troy and Ricky race each other from the door of the Senior Boy's room. They dash around the corner of the hallway and down the first set of stairs, where ahead of them is twelve year old Albert who is slowly making his way back to the treatment center. Albert has just been sent from school for angrily telling one of his classmates to 'fuck off' and his body is ready to explode. But Ricky and Troy don't know this and they don't really care. Ricky takes the stairs two at a time, and as he pushes by Albert he gives him a friendly elbow in the shoulder. His mind swirling, Albert barely notices Ricky until Troy's booming voice shouts a throaty "Allbbberrrtttt" from behind. With bottled frustration swimming round and round and round inside his head, Albert's tiny body reactively tenses up… Paula, the teacher's aide who works in the gym, watches the boys fly by from the school entrance. She is waiting, as she does every day, for all the phys. ed. students to make their way to the gym. Before the last syllable of Albert's name has even left Ricky's mouth, Paula has caught Albert's eye. Ricky swings by the two of them and disappears behind Troy to the corridors of the basement floor. Paula gently suggests to Albert that he go back to the residence to calm down. She

watches him from the door as he does this, then follows the last of the students down to where they gather by the equipment and change rooms.

Inside the gym it's free time, the first five to fifteen minutes of class where everyone gets to do what they want. Troy and Ricky immediately reach for a basketball from the storage room, where Ronda, the phys. ed. teacher is distributing equipment. Troy grabs one of the few leather balls and stuffs it under his shirt. When he looks up and sees Ronda watching him, he yells, "NO!" She just smiles and says 'Hello Troy'. Seconds later, Ricky jumps out at her from behind the storage room door. Ronda jumps then whimpers in a rehearsed voice "*Oh, you scared me.*" The boys laugh then bounce their way down the final set of stairs to the gym. Ronda turns back to talk to Alex, a newer student who can't decide what to do. He spots a set of lime green stilts standing up against the wall in the corner and asks Ronda "What's that?" Ronda smiles, saying "Ah haaa" as if to say, "good choice."

Inside the gym, a second teacher's aide is playing badminton with Peter. Troy and Ricky have started a game of 21. When Alex enters the gym, a few students look at his stilts then run to the equipment room to get their own. Ronda enters the gym and offers to buy a drink for anyone who makes it around the gym without falling off the stilts. The reward is enthusiastically welcomed by the sets of eyes that look back at her before setting out to meet the challenge. Everyone is trying hard, and when they fall, they go back to the start and try again. In the corner, Paula is gently persuading a student who is lying on the mat to "get going."

Alex is having lots of trouble on the stilts, but he is watching the others try, and he keeps going at it, even though his face says "I'm not very happy" to be failing.

Each time he falls, he puts the stilts in the corner and shoots a few baskets, then comes back to try again. James makes it ¾ of the way around the gym, all the while yelling, "Ronda, Ronda, Ronda" to get her attention. He keeps yelling for her right up until he falls. Peter tries going around the gym backwards; he is very good and has negotiated this extra challenge with Ronda. This task has his full attention. When Alex falls down to the floor in the far corner, Ronda goes over to see if he's okay. She can't tell if he's laughing or crying, but when she checks up close, he smiles and jumps up. "He's only foolin'." Alex then says, "I quit," and Ronda tells him not to quit, but to take a rest. She then changes the challenge for Alex "because you're just starting" and tells him he only has to go to the black line for a drink. James makes it half way around this time, falls, laughs and comes back to try again. Peter, getting closer to the finish, proclaims that he is "Michael Jordan" on stilts. Ricky and Troy stop their game to watch Peter who finally reaches the end point. Immediately after, James challenges Peter to see who can go furthest the fastest.

When free time ends Ronda calls everyone in and they plunk themselves around her. Troy, who's been a bit on edge since the start of class, loudly yells "FU…!!" to which Ronda replies, "Fun!!" emphasis on the 'n'. "Is that what you wanted to say?" A few students are already quite sweaty and the gym begins to take on a damp, musty smell. Peter and Ricky stand off to the side, and Troy wanders to the corner of the gym. Ronda focuses on the students in front of her and asks, "What do you want to do?" When someone suggests Octopus five hands shoot up in agreement. Suddenly, there is yelping and the kids jump up and run toward the end wall. Troy slams his body into the mats that line the walls under the basket. He

bounces back and forth in a rolling motion up and down the end line. Each time the mat falls off its velcro attachment, and Ronda asks him to put the mats back up "…Cause we don't want people flying into it". She quickly calls over to Alex to review the rules with him. Some students are talking which forces Ronda to speak louder. She then asks, "Are you ready?" The game begins, and ends six rounds later when the students decide to finish class with a game of basketball.

**Engaging alienated youth**

The leftover images from the high school shootings in Littleton, Colorado and Taber, Alberta reinforce what many educators already know about our schools: there is too much bullying going on, too much alienation along lines of difference, too much indifference toward those who can be marginalized from the mainstream, meaning, too little support for "troubled" youth. Class sizes are larger, funding for educational resources are smaller, and the burgeoning effects of "predatory culture" are manifested ever more potently as the global corporate culture is reproduced daily in homes and schools (McLaren, 1995). The implied messages of violent school tragedies are an indictment of the education profession and, given the highly emotional, interactive, social nature of the physical education class (Hellison, 1991; McHugh, 1996), a warning signal for physical education teachers to more reflexively consider the type of social climate being created each day in their schools and gymnasiums. Physical education environments can either validate or combat alienation and marginalization,[1] and in this paper, I will present a case study of a physical education program for troubled youth that promotes social inclusion as a means to engage alienated youth

through physical activity and play. But first, I will begin with a summary of what the current research literature has to say about social climates in physical education.

***Physical education: contexts of engagement or alienation?***

The alienation of young people in physical education classes is nothing new. As far back as the 1970's, Terry Orlick (1975) was writing about the physical activity environment's capacity to enhance or destroy the participant's feelings of self. Despite the promising monikers of such books as *Every Kid Can Win* (Orlick and Botterill, 1975) and more recent articles titled, 'If we build it, they will come: creating an emotionally safe physical education environment' (Helion, 1996), alienation remains an unfortunate consequence of the physical education experience for too many students in too many physical education programs (Carlson, 1995; Humbert, 1995; Ennis, Cothran, Davidson, Loftus, Owens, Swanson & Hopsicker, 1997).

Gymnasiums can be loud, interactive social settings where freedom of movement, body contact, vocalizations, gestures, and actions between students can be chaotically positive or negative (McHugh, 1996). As McHugh stated (1996, p. 26), "activity in the gym is inherently social and qualitatively different from what occurs in the classroom", where the movement focus requires the suspension of many classroom formalities. Notwithstanding the experiential social structure of the physical activity environment, the socio-emotional or "affective" development of the individual in the physical education class has, until recent years, been an oft-neglected area of physical education scholarship and practice (Gibbons & Bressan, 1991; Hellison, 1995; Halas & Sander, 1988). The complexity and subtlety of the affective domain has made it difficult for teachers to define objectives and plan programs that might otherwise

capitalize on the gymnasium's proclivity toward the social. This lack of focused attention might partially explain the number of physical education students who are being picked on, ignored, excluded, or harassed in our school gymnasiums.

***Contexts of alienation***

According to social sciences' definitions, alienation can occur when persistent negative feelings are derived from meaninglessness, powerlessness, and isolation: students who feel powerless to control or change negative situations in the gym are those most likely to withdraw emotionally, mentally or physically from the physical education class (Carlson, 1995). Rough and disruptive students can have a particularly unpleasant effect on a gym environment (Rowley, 1996). A critical or disrespectful physical education class environment can be particularly difficult for low skilled participants who must endure the humiliation and embarrassment of performing "poorly" in front of their often intolerant peers (Portman, 1995). Processes of marginalization can occur quickly; in a study of seventh grade physical education class (Smith & Goc Karp, 1996), the researchers noted that cliques formed within the first two weeks of the term, and group membership and boundaries were subsequently sustained by a variety of exclusionary tactics, including verbal abuse and aggression. In some cases, a student's prior status and individual attributes, such as poor hygiene, anger and aggressive behavior, contributed to her or his own marginalization. When teachers refused requests for help, blamed the marginalized student, or ignored exclusionary practices, the processes of isolation were legitimated.

Even in programs where respect and cooperation are promoted as integral aspects of the physical education program, negative interactions can occur between

students (Halas, 1987). Not being passed the ball, being picked on, laughed at, or ignored, are all examples of negative interactions that can happen in the gym. Despite the high level of actively participating physical education students in a low-income, multi-racial school where physical education was uniformly perceived to be a major contributor to school spirit, issues of safety, gender, race, and social class were problematic (Fenton, Frisby, & Luke, 1999). In order to improve experiences for all students, continued efforts must be made to focus upon the organizational structures within physical education that create inequity according to gender, class, and race (Fenton et al., 1999; Lawson, 1998).

Negative experiences in physical education can be accentuated for girls, particularly for those who participate in co-educational classes where they must endure ridicule, harassment, and exclusion from the boys who make disparaging comments on the girls' skill level and/or physical appearance (Humbert, 1995). Rituals of changing (e.g., being forced to wear shorts instead of long pants or go bare foot in the gym) can have a negative impact on the student's willingness to participate in the class (Fenton et al., 1999). When domination and verbal or physical harassment occur without any form of teacher intervention, girls are marginalized 'off' the court or playing field (Humbert, 1995; Nugent & Faucette, 1995). For girls, lower participation levels can result in poorer skill development, thus reproducing the gendered stereotype that *girls can't play as well as boys*.

Students who feel uncomfortable in the gym must devise creative ways to adapt to and/or avoid participation. Some strategies identified in the literature include such action plans as not changing or avoiding the change room (e.g., wearing shorts

underneath jeans), hiding out of view of others, being a spectator, becoming wallflowers, faking effort, publicly (e.g., "this sucks") or privately devaluing the activity, acquiescing to, seeking favor with or ignoring the negative behaviors of others, fighting back, accepting exclusion, and isolating oneself, (Carlson, 1995; Halas, 1991; Humbert, 1995; Smith & Goc Karp, 1996). An unfortunate consequence for students who successfully avoid participation over long periods of time is that they lose opportunities to improve skills and interact with others, which can further contribute to their marginalization. When students sense that they have little control over the outcomes in achievement situations (e.g., physical education class), prolonged or pervasive fear of failure or refusal to engage in a learning task is perceived by some as leading to "learned helplessness" (Martinek, 1996; Martinek & Griffith, 1994). While "learned helplessness" (which in some cases may be better described as "taught helplessness") is considered to be a generalized personality trait, one could argue that it is a "situation-specific" effect of both poor teaching and/or poor choice of curriculum content in too many physical education contexts.

In two studies that asked pre-service teachers to describe their past experiences in physical education, results indicated that both class content and teacher qualities contribute to how students were made to feel during the physical education class. Bowyer's (1996) group of university participants from an elementary physical education course identified the following as their least liked activities: fitness testing (had to perform in front of peers, fitness skills insufficiently prepared), dodgeball games (always got hit, had to sit out), running (too physically demanding, too slow), picking teams (always picked last), rope climbing (couldn't do it, instructor did not

modify activity), basketball and softball (insufficient skill; felt left out; unit lasted too long).[2] In a second study, negative teacher qualities and practices included showing favoritism, being coercive or humiliating students, emphasizing competition and performance over effort, excluding students (due to a lack of ability), being lazy, showing no consideration for individual differences, and using exercise as punishment (Thompson, Mandigo, & Halas, 1998). The results of these studies are consistent with the somewhat infamous '*Physical education wall of shame*' (Williams, 1994a, 1994b) which, in addition to the aforementioned inappropriate practices, points an accusing finger at low participation time factors, using phys. ed. classes as sports camps, using developmentally inappropriate equipment, and lack of emphasis on teaching motor skills and lifetime physical fitness.

Regarding evaluation practices, Lawson (1998) calls into question the problematic nature of grading in physical education classes where standardized tests, grades, credits and graduation requirements formulate the profession's desire to dress up physical education to resemble academic subjects:

> "Making the grade" and "deserving credit" has meant complying with teachers' and other school leaders' rules, regulations and meaning systems. (En)forced play, games, sport, and exercise required external incentives, rewards, and sanctions" (p.9).

Given the recent move toward 'outcomes based curriculum' that dominates much physical education discourse, the impact of grading practices and the values that they reinforce must be carefully considered. As an example, in one study that evaluated student perceptions of grading, it was shown that students hold strong opinions and

feelings (in this case, frustration and disappointment) about grading criterion (Nugent & Faucette, 1995). These authors concluded that using unattainable criteria such as team sports skills as a grading policy might be counter productive to physical education's goal of promoting enjoyment and lifetime participation in physical activities.

In a study comparing contextual factors, both positive and negative, that contributed to perceptions about physical education, 21 physical education teachers and their students in six high schools were observed and interviewed in order to identify which aspects of the class environment were disengaging versus those that were inviting and welcoming (Ennis et al., 1997). Many students reported that class content could be embarrassing, boring, and irrelevant to their lives. At two of the schools, student dislike for physical education was manifested in negative behaviors which led the physical education teachers to use increased control and punitive measures in order to ensure a standard of discipline that was expected by principals. Teachers were often disconnected from their students, and in one school, student resistance to the program was met with banishment to the "Hole", where one teacher stood guard to make sure that the 30 to 40 students who regularly rejected the curriculum by not dressing out or participating, wouldn't misbehave.

Teachers in this study also reported that they were required to teach in personal contexts of fear and alienation where they too felt isolated, detached, and at times afraid of their students. In these climates, personal safety and property safety were real concerns for students and teachers alike; all were forced to contemplate the possibility of violence throughout their school day. In response to such fears, some

schools deployed security systems to keep dangerous neighbourhood individuals outside and legitimate students inside. These and other types of policing interventions, commonly referred to as "get tough" policies, transform educational institutions into prisons, where increased control, suspensions, and expulsions appear to have only minimal influence on decreasing perceptions of fear in schools (Noguera, cited in Ennis et al., 1997). In fact, research has shown that victimization of students by teachers, administrators, and other school staff in the name of discipline has potential to contribute to student misbehavior, alienation, and aggression (Hyman & Perone, 1998).

***Engaging climates***

Physical education environments that are engaging are often described as "inviting" contexts where students can feel physically and emotionally or psychologically safe (Helion, 1996). Students tend to feel safer when they know that their teachers are positive, supportive, caring, sincerely interested in them as individuals, and can be trusted (Dyson, 1995; Ennis et al., 1997). To gain that trust, teachers must engage in reflective practices. As an example of reflective practice, one teacher explained how she engages in a "psychological game" where she is always wondering how her students are interpreting what she is saying and doing, whether her words, actions, and "energy" makes students comfortable or uncomfortable (Ennis et al.). Effort must also be made to understand student resistance to the teacher or curriculum. In my own efforts to create a nurturing and relevant physical education curriculum for troubled youth (Halas, 1998), I have learned to question the curricular imperatives that guide our programs. In my experience, negative student behavior in

the gymnasium can reveal information regarding culturally inappropriate or disrespectful practice that, through teacher collaboration with students can be changed or improved.

Other lessons have emerged from the research literature. Physical education content needs to be developmentally appropriate (Helion, 1996), personally relevant and meaningful (Carlson, 1995; Eng, 1998) and culturally- responsive for all students, irrespective of their ability in the class (Carlson, 1995; Ennis et al.; Hopple & Graham, 1995). Competitive games need to be organized in such a way that skill levels developmentally match the challenge, where opportunities to play, "score" and succeed are enhanced for all students (e.g., by playing smaller games, modifying the target), where the importance of winning and losing is put into proper perspective, and "trying hard" and "having fun" become important outcomes that are somehow rewarded (Dyson, 1995; Stein, Keeler, & Carpenter, 1991; Wessinger, 1994). Time is another important factor. When students are given enough time to learn and improve their skills, their enjoyment of the activity can increase (Pastie, 1998; Tjeerdsma, Rink & Graham, 1996). Unfortunately, the lack of time for physical education combined with the number and variety of physical activities currently prescribed by many government legislated curricula often leads to a scenario where a few days of skill practice is followed by game play. That is, students are not provided adequate opportunity to experience enough 'practice time' to develop the skills that would enhance their level of enjoyment in the game. This is an on-going dilemma in many physical education contexts, and if ignored, a devastating obstacle.

Research involving achievement motivation theory has highlighted the importance of mastery climates (Duda, 1996; Treasure & Roberts, 1995; Walling & Duda, 1995), where the important connection between effort and success is reinforced. Mastery climates are particularly important for those students who have experienced pervasive failure in the physical activity contexts (Martinek & Griffith, 1994). Mastery discourses can be disrupted, however, in many physical education programs. A discrepancy exists between the messages received in a classroom situation where students are encouraged to "try their best" and "improve" yet are graded on standardized performance norms. The creation of mastery climates that are situated within contexts that reward students with competitive grades based on pre-determined benchmarks is conflicting. Despite the large number of research studies that investigated mastery climates in physical education, where "just trying hard" was important, these studies often took place in physical education programs where the impact of assessment (i.e., criteria used to arrive at a grade) on students' perceptions (of self, of the physical education program, of success) was not investigated (Veal & Campgnone, 1995). Even a proclaimed 'mastery' environment may be made irrelevant by a grading system that reinforces competitive grades along lines of skill competency as opposed to other criteria, such as 'participation and effort' (see Halas, 1989 for a sample grading system).

**Affective programs: planned activities to promote positive social interactions**

The creation of a positive learning climate that engages all students equitably and fairly in a physically and psychologically safe gymnasium doesn't just happen. Inclusive and inviting physical education programs must be thoughtfully planned for

and evaluated regularly to ensure that goals are being met (Halas, 1989). In what has been referred to as the hidden curriculum, character development, moral development, or, more recently, the affective domain, the goals remain somewhat similar: that is, the positive personal and social development of the individual. Much of the research in character development has been based upon either social learning theory or structural developmental theory (Solomon, 1997).[3] Combined, they provide the theoretical framework for many intervention programs that attempt to influence the moral development of participants in a physical activity setting (e.g., Miller, Bredemeir & Shields, 1997; *Fair Play for Kids*, see Gibbons, Ebbeck & Weiss, 1995).

Where these theory-based teaching strategies have been empirically tested in ecological contexts (i.e., physical education and school contexts), results have indicated that such outcomes as moral reasoning and pro-social behavior were enhanced (Gibbons & Ebbeck, 1997; Gibbons et al., 1995; Romance, Weiss & Bockoven, 1986). In a summary of the research investigating the relationship between sport and various character-related attributes and behaviors, Shields & Bredemeier (1995), conclude that a complex set of factors related to the specific sport and the social interactions involved will determine how the participant is influenced through participation. Overall, research in the affective domain, including moral or character development studies, highlights that the development of such (socially-constructed, normative) attributes as compassion, fairness, sportspersonship, integrity (Shields & Bredemeier) and fair play (Solomon, 1997) doesn't automatically happen in physical education; rather, the implementation of specific teaching strategies is required to effect positive change (i.e., students demonstrate characteristics of each attribute as

defined within a local context, as in sharing equipment, cooperating, or acknowledging involvement in a conflict, et cetera).

Programs that encourage students to treat each other better in the gymnasium can have positive impact upon the social climate, particularly for individual students who may struggle to get along with others (Halas, 1997; Patrick, Ward, & Crouch, 1998). Being encouraged to exercise personal and social responsibility in the class, whether through engaging in leadership activities (Ennis et al., 1997), acknowledging accountability for social behaviors (Patrick et al., 1998), or choosing curriculum content (Dyson, 1995) can lead to increased personal growth and commitment to the physical education program. Planned efforts to promote positive social interactions between students may include cooperative learning games and activities (Mercier, 1992; Orlick, 1982; Smith, Markley & Goc Karp, 1997), good behavior games (Patrick et al., 1998), team building activities (e.g., praise phrases versus put downs, Gibbons & Black, 1997) and Hellison's (1995) levels program that promotes personal and social responsibility. In a study that applied Hellison's personal and social responsibility program, results indicated that engaging climates can become places where troubled youth can feel safe to take risks, make mistakes, and commit to something in climates of openness, invitation and forgiveness (Herbel & Parker, 1997). Again, the message remains that students need to be listened to and their input thoughtfully considered with regard to curriculum content and creation of the social climate. To do so may have a very positive effect on the students' willingness to engage in the physical education program.

**The context of this study: an 'active' adolescent treatment center**

According to Graham (1995), research in the area of physical education would benefit from the identification and systematic study of already existing programs that are positively impacting upon students, "by whatever standards one chooses" (p. 481). The research story that I am about to tell takes place at an adolescent treatment center/school where students are actively participating in their school's active living program. The children and youth whose voices you will hear in this study have been officially placed into care at the Macdonald residential treatment facility (a pseudonym) for young people who are experiencing severe emotional and behavioral difficulties. Macdonald center has been ranked in the top 15% of internationally accredited residential treatment centers in North America and is located in a predominantly whitestream,[4] urban western Canadian center.

The children and youth who attend Macdonald center receive individual treatment plans that might include: counseling for drug and alcohol addictions, physical and sexual abuse; behavior and anger management; recreation therapy; and when necessary, secure supervision in a locked environment. The center also provides family and group therapy, educational, recreational, spiritual and cultural activities. With the overall goal of Macdonald Center being the re-integration of the individual into their community environment, residents are encouraged to attend Macdonald school, situated on the grounds of the center, as soon as they are ready. Macdonald school has 12 teaching and support staff for approximately 45 students (daily attendance figures fluctuate). One-quarter of the student population lives in the community and attends the center as day-treatment students.

Active living is an integral aspect of the school day at Macdonald center. As part of the active living program, students receive a minimum 200 minutes of physical education each week, an amount that exceeds the maximum amount of time offered in most schools (Halas, 1993; Rowley, 1996; Manitoba Education and Training, 1995). Students can also opt into a further 350 minutes of scheduled physical activity option time per week, which is supplemented by 30 minutes of daily noon-hour sports as well as school-wide special events or unscheduled active living breaks, such as an impromptu decision to go tobogganing on a wintry- warm Friday afternoon. Throughout the year, extended outdoor activities are also planned, including camping, canoeing, cross-country skiing, and bike trips. A limited slate of extra curricular activities is offered as the school's transient student population hinders efforts to regularly participate in inter-school competitions. It is estimated by school staff that as many as three quarters of the school population on a given day participate in the lunch hour activities and most estimates from both students and staff suggest that very few students avoid participating in their daily, 50 minute physical education classes. With all this activity offered on a daily basis, students were provided multiple opportunities to choose to be physically active throughout the school day, a choice that, according to their enthusiastic participation in the program, students appeared to be taking. Given the active participation of students in school-based physical activities, I decided to conduct an interpretive case study (Merriam, 1988) of the active living program.

***Building a researched interpretation: A bricolage***

In order to build a study that would correspond to the culture and demands of a naturalistic setting that was quite unpredictable[5], I used what Denzin and Lincoln

(1994) describe as a *bricolage,* i.e., a "pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in concrete situations" (p. 2). Derived from postmodern theorizing, a bricolage allows for an emergent construction of the research project such that it can change form through the use of a varied assortment of methodological tools and strategies, the choice of which can never be predetermined, are context dependent, and in some cases, need to be invented as the study unfolds (Denzin & Lincoln; also see Hermes, 1998). The end product of this form of research is a collage-like creation that, in its density and complexity, represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the phenomenon under question (Denzin & Lincoln). These understandings are always temporal and embedded in language, never fixed or final (Ellis, 1998), and also reflective of what Smith (as cited in Ellis) refers to as the fusion of horizons, (i.e., the dialogical encounter of various perspectives in the hermeneutic process).

Crossing over two academic years (i.e., from March to March), I spent time at the treatment center/school on five separate occasions for a total period of five weeks. By conducting the fieldwork in various phases, I was able to become fully engaged in the hermeneutic process of re-circling through the data, such that new ideas, directions and specific questions to be asked in the study emerged as the situation warranted after each data collection (Ellis, 1998). By going back and forth to the study site, I was also able to be present for the changing rhythms of each academic year. As an example, in the time between my first to last data collection, the person responsible for the physical education program changed three times, and the overall school timetable was significantly modified on two occasions. My presence in the school over time allowed

me to witness not only how students responded to the new teachers or timetable, but how these transitions occurred.

***Research Activities***

Throughout the data collection period, I conducted a series of student and staff interviews. Supplementary to these, I recorded observations of many aspects of the school day, such as the morning staff meetings, students waiting outside for school to start, classroom activities, lunch hour in the cafeteria, noon hour basketball, lunch hour activities outside, physical education classes, physical activity option classes, other activity options (e.g., a visit to the senior's home), and special events. I also collected a variety of school and student documents, including yearly mission statements, lesson plans, attendance figures, student report cards, samples of student work, and student certificates of achievement. All combined, these resources provide a colorful mosaic of daily life at the school.

***Data collection***

For each phase of the data collection, actual participants were chosen on the day of the study from those students with authorized consent who were present in school, interested, and able to participate. Student interviews took place at various times throughout the school day dependent upon student interest. This moment often depended on the mood of the student as he or she saw me in the hallway or classroom. Participants who preferred not to be audio-taped were interviewed in semi-formal conversations and I hand recorded notes for immediate transcription after the interview.

***Interviews***

The initial interviews were flexible and phenomenologically based (Dale, 1996; van Manen, 1997), that is, as the researcher I asked students to describe the details of their daily participation in physical activities. In follow-up visits to the school, I also used a narrative inquiry question protocol, adapted from Ellis (1998). As Ellis states, narrative questions are open ended, and tap into the individual's memories, feelings, thoughts, and stories that she or he might like to talk about. By using a variety of "prompts", students were encouraged to talk about things that were important to them, thus allowing me to get a more complete "sense" of who they were. Ellis indicated that this process also challenges the researcher and the participants to find a language of "common referents" so that the conversations and dialogue can be understood by both parties.

***Observations***

With regard to my fieldwork observations, I recorded events not as a video-camera recording "accurately" events as they happened (Boostrom, 1994), but as someone who was subjectively involved in the meaning making process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Manning, 1997). As Smith (1991) says, "hermeneutics is about creating meaning, not simply reporting on it" (p. 201). Over time, I began to notice aspects of the active living program that I had never really considered prior to beginning the study. Through reflexivity, our interpretations of events can change in their focus, thus leading to new ways of seeing an event we may have once taken for granted (Boostrom, 1994). Throughout the study, I attempted to exercise my own hermeneutic imagination (Smith, as cited in Ellis, 1998) at various stages of the

"sifting through" of data, and this process was aided by my keeping of a journal (Patton, 1990) along with the practice of "writing and rewriting" of narrative stories (van Manen, 1997).

***Data analysis***

Wolf (1992) describes the process of analyzing data as one that involves a synthesis of facts and fantasy surrounding "the messiness of experience" where effort is directed at finding patterns and shared attitudes exhibited within a very small fragment in time. "As ethnographers, our job is not simply to pass on the disorderly complexity of culture, but also to try to hypothesize about apparent consistencies, to lay out our best guesses, without hiding the contradictions and the instability" (Wolf, p.129). My own interpretation of the data was informed by my previous exposure to the Macdonald program (as a former physical education specialist I had helped to develop the program), my reading of related professional and scholarly literature, the insights gained by sharing ideas with both my colleagues and a group of significant *others* (a diverse group of people *outside* of the study) who read through transcripts and written drafts of work and provided their own interpretive feedback regarding the emerging themes (Fine & Weiss, cited in Schultz, 1997; Manning, 1997).

In what Manning (1997) refers to as member checking, that is, a collaborative process of negotiated outcomes, I also reviewed field notes, working hypotheses and case study drafts with students and staff throughout the various phases of the study. I recorded both their negative and positive comments regarding my developing interpretations, and asked them to help me better understand those elements of the analysis that were surprising, unexpected, or in need of further clarification. While it

is obviously my voice that is most represented through my written work, I have tried to write narratives that are congruent with the research site and have used feedback from 'key respondents' (Manning) as an accountability check. As an example, one of the newer teachers at Macdonald school read an earlier draft of work for this manuscript and responded with the comment, "You've really captured the spirit of this place." While this feedback was encouraging, the value of a document rests in its generative qualities to create new possibilities for effective action (Heshusius & Ballard, 1996; Kvale, 1995; Peshkin, 1993). To this end, I was also encouraged when the principal suggested that he would use the results reported in a paper written from pilot work at the school (Halas & Watkinson, 1999) to lobby for an increase in the physical education teacher's half-time position at the school.

Kvale (1995) refers to knowledge as a *communal construction of reality*; truth is constituted through a dialogical process whereby conflicting interpretations and action possibilities are discussed and negotiated. As such, the analysis that follows is but one interpretation; one attempt to better understand the meaning with which students experience physical activity in their day to day life at Macdonald School. In an effort to draw meaning from the student's interpretations of their physical activity experiences, I have constructed a series of narrative stories (Polkinghorne, 1995) and interpretive themes to create a metaphorical representation of what the physical education program looks and feels like. The discussion that follows represents the insights I have constructed around the research question: how does the active living program work?

**Active living at MacDonald School: a gym where "everybody gets a chance"**

In the first set of interviews at the school, a picture of the gym as a popular, socially inclusive space began to emerge (Halas & Watkinson, 1999). At this time, I had spoken with six of the day treatment students who described the positive interactions, the cheering and high fives that accompanied their participation in the gym. They perceived their gymnasium to be a safe place where fun happened as they burned off energy between classes, thus providing a necessary break from the routine of school. These comments were later reinforced by other students I spoke with who suggested that school without a gym would be too boring, and "it'd be dull, and everybody would be getting…like really mad in class and stuff and you'd be all edgy." While many of the initial student comments pointed toward some of the more well-known physical and social benefits of physical activity (e.g., burns off energy, sense of belonging and accomplishment), the conditions from which these outcomes were experienced and their relevance to the students are issues that I attempt to address more fully in this paper.

***Interpreting the rhythms of active living: this gym has a pulse***

The ambiguously spoken word "gym/Jim" in the popular student query "do we have gym next?" provides an interesting double entendre personifying an inanimate space. This is a simple yet intriguing phenomenon that is accentuated at Macdonald school where the *gym comes to life* each morning as the first set of feet bound down the stairs toward the equipment room. First class of the day and the gym is quiet, cool, the lights are off. The only indications of movement are the black rubber tread marks that scar the gym floor from one end to the other, fossilized remnants of yesterday's

activities. Toward the end of period one, a teacher will be downstairs with a few students, allowing precious moments of free time as reward for good behavior in class. Access to the gym is pretty much first come first serve, and the kids often arrive eager just to see who will be down there. Although morning time is typically a quieter affair, when arriving in 2's, students might organize a game of badminton or join up for an improvised scrimmage of some sort with whomever happens by the gym. These match-ups often have an air of the unexpected, as there are few guarantees regarding how the dynamics will play out given each student's individual energies. But there's space enough to absorb the prevailing negative or positive energies as they blow through the gym, student plus/minus ions attracting and repelling each other.

The greater the number of students, the higher the noise level. The decibels reach the red zone at noon each day as a trail of students make their way from the cafeteria to the gym, pulled, as one student said, "Like ants to sugar." The lunch hour attraction is pick-up basketball, where every day a group of teachers, youth care workers, and kids gather, pick teams "that are equal" and play "just for fun". On this court, it doesn't really matter who is picked first or last because the game goes best when teams are equally matched. "Everybody gets a chance," the kids explained. Trying hard is how you learn. "You just come down and play, kids who aren't very good just try." The skills will develop with time.

They play games to three baskets and the losing team moves off the court with the swoosh of the third hoop. Time goes quick. On the court, off the court. Up the court, down the court. Up for the shot, down for the dribble. When you make a goofy, bad pass or miss the backboard entirely, well, … you might be mocked. But the play

carries on and any laughter is left behind because the ball won't wait. It keeps moving and to keep up you have to focus on the game. Fouls can break the rhythm, and sometimes anger boils over, but the staff member is right there to step in. Negative energy is quickly re-focused, either off the court with a "time out" or out the door (when necessary) and as much as possible the game keeps going. When a student is sent from the gym it means 'out for now, but come back tomorrow'. Those remaining play to the last basket, cheered on by the staff who stand by to shake everyone's hand and congratulate good effort.

Activities continue throughout the afternoon, the sound of bouncing balls and multiple voices rising to crescendos as the gym's vocal chords echo throughout the school. The rhythm of student life resonates with loudness and laughter. During one of my interviews in an upstairs classroom, a female student referred to the noise stating:

> Student: They're having a lot of fun. Sounds like it. *(at this point, you can hear the phys. ed. class going on downstairs, and there is lots of screaming, etc...)* Screaming and yelling and whistles (ha ha). It distracts you in your class…you want to be down there with them.

By first class of the afternoon, the gym is hot and humid. And it stinks with perspiration. The gym is now filled with physical education students who come in all shapes and sizes to participate in a climate that is for the most part non-threatening and fun, where down-time is the devil and fair play a key to success. Encouragement, not coercion, is the modus operandi and somehow the end product is a program that succeeds in bringing some of the angriest, loneliest, most marginalized youth together

on the same court through play, day after day, all year long. Some days can be horrendous, where nothing goes right and negative energy reaches a critical mass that spreads like an infestation. But bad days come and go without missing a beat. Tomorrow is always different.

In spring time, seepage from the melting snow oozes out from the edges of the basement gym floor, leaving black puddles of murky water to incapacitate the gym lest someone end up flat on their back. As with an illness, activity is forced to a standstill waiting for the weather to be good outside. When the sun does shine, students pour out of the school, finding their way out back to the grassy field, where activities like ultimate frisbee, softball, soccer, football, low organized games, track and field, and lacrosse take place. On these days, the field becomes the stage, where the continuous rhythms of the school day stretch out and unwind freely in the fresh air and warm, soothing winds.

While the attraction of young people to games, sports, and physical activities may not be that surprising, what was rather unexpected was how the small size and poor physical condition of the gym didn't detract from its popularity. In fact, very few students complained about the gym or the condition it was in, unless I asked, and even then the frustration expressed was mild. "Yeah, it's really frustrating. Well, not to me but, I know how to hit the ball now. But some kids, it's just, 'damn roof, you'… *(when the volleyball hits the low roof)*." Perhaps the gym's imperfections made it less threatening, more accessible. Between shots at the basket one day, a thirteen year old summarized the role of the gym at Macdonald, stating, "Let's just say that 'school without a gymnasium would be lifeless." Given the perceived importance of the gym

to this school, it makes sense to think of this space as having a physiological biorhythm reflecting the nature of the school. The intimacy of the space reflects the program, and, as one teacher remarked, "phys. ed. is the pulse of the school."

***The scary side of gym...***

Issues of personal safety are compounded at Macdonald school due to the low self-esteem and poor body image that typifies many students, particularly those who are dealing with issues of sexual and physical abuse. Many students also have difficulty socializing with peers and adults, and receive anger management counseling as part of their treatment plan. While these presenting problems accompany students throughout their school day, placing these youngsters into a gymnasium that is small and onto a playing court that reaches full capacity at ten students is a potential invitation for violation of personal space. Given that the structure of many physical activities and games enables a certain aggression that requires self-control, placing students into competitive situations where body contact happens can add to the volatility of a situation. These realities confront students on a daily basis, and as the following student comments suggest, safety is an issue they are well aware of in their school:

> Student: For some kids that go there that have a lot of really negative energy, and there's an open space in the gym, and that's where they'll take it out on some of the kids.
>
> *Joannie: ...and that'll happen in the gym?*
>
> Student: Yeah. But it's really not a fight cause they really split it apart real quickly.

Conversely, one of the girls thought that the openness of the gym space made it easier for students to cooperate. The quick pace of physical activity starkly contrasted with the "boring" routine of the classroom, where "nothing's happening" and kids had more "down" time to bug each other. And space mattered:

> Student: I think one's better than the other. I think the gym is better, because there's more space down in the gym. If you get mad at someone, you can go somewhere else…and in the classroom, there's not much room.

One of the younger boys commented about the not so good days in the gym, suggesting that body size was an issue.

> *Joannie*: *How safe do kids feel in the gym?*
>
> Student: I don't know, safe I guess, cause, uhm, … it feels more safe than other days.
>
> *Joannie*: *Than other days? How do you mean?*
>
> Student: Like, say like, a long time ago, there's always big kids, I always got scared if they were about to do something. Like they'd always fake it and everything.
>
> *Joannie:* *What's made the big difference now?*
>
> Student: I don't know. Those big kids don't seem as big … cause I remember Bobby and Kevin. Bobby is not that much taller than me…when I saw him last.

Another student described a safe gym as one where "nobody throws balls at them and shoots a ball at them." Particularly for children and youth who have grown up in

violence, seeing a fight can be really scary. One of the girls expressed the following concern:

> *Joannie*: *Is it ever bad for kids in the gym?*
>
> Student: Sometimes. Well, for me it is. Cause when I see like people fighting and, it brings back memories like that happened to me and things that I've done to people. And I don't like that.

And sometimes conflicts turn into a fight. Fortunately, these are for the most part, quickly resolved.

> Student: In basketball we're taking a shot and he elbowed me, like, to miss the shot. I guarded him anyway and then he elbowed me again and called me a smart-ass. So I pushed him and he pushed me back and he just kept on continuing until Paula and then Ronda broke it up. But, after then, after a couple minutes, we're okay.
>
> Student: I've seen little scraps but not too major. And no one's really ever got hurt there.

Many of the students responded that fights don't happen that often in the gym, and as the student above mentioned, they are broken up quickly by staff. For students, knowing that negative behavior will be consistently and fairly dealt with increases student confidence in teachers (Ennis et al., 1997). While the presence of staff to supervise in the gym contributed immensely to the students' feelings of safety, other important factors contributed to the creation of a psychologically and physically safe gym environment.

*A safe gym ...*

The first line of the Macdonald School mission statement says that the school will provide a safe environment for all students, and this was true for the gym. As a starting point, students who weren't comfortable in the gym had the choice whether to attend physical education or go elsewhere during the period. Not being forced into participating was a key factor that appeared to mediate the students' physical activity experience. And if ever anyone didn't feel safe, they could simply leave the gym.

> Student: If there's anything unsafe, you can just choose not to participate in it. That usually doesn't happen, though.

The same applied with regard to changing for class. Given the level of past experience with sexual abuse, the physical education teacher felt that changing for class should be an option. It was encouraged but not a stipulation. If the student felt comfortable to do so, he or she would change on his or her own in the change rooms. Some would wait till the change room was empty; others wouldn't bother at all. To the teachers at the school, having the student participate in class was far more important than what the student was wearing. Apart from the few students who *really* needed a change of clothes (i.e., those who would routinely leave the gym drenched to the core), running around in a pair of jeans or baggy sweatshirt was not a problem.

Another unique feature of the program was the separation of classes that mixed two classes of older boys together separate from a grouping of younger boys with girls. Although co-ed physical education classes can often expose girls to the risk of physical injury, insult, or harassment from their male peers, the unusual blend of

younger boys with the girls seemed quite effective in mediating the personal safety issues for the girls.

> Student: I like the phys. ed. here cause there's not guys, as many guys there to laugh at you. Well, they're actually called little boys cause they're all short…

While the girls sometimes complained that the "little boys" were too hyper, to watch them enthusiastically interact with each other in a variety of low organized games left the opposite impression. The younger boys' willingness to engage in all kinds of play and games seemed to have a positive effect on the girls' enjoyment of the classes.

When asked to explain the best part of the game, one of the more enthusiastic female participants in the gym replied "being with people that you like, trust, and no one hurts you when you're playing." When I asked one of the older boys what makes a great activity, he had a similar reply.

> Student: Just playing basketball, having fun, everyone is having fun, no fights, no arguments, everyone gets involved.

Given the often chaotic backgrounds of the students, being able to just play and have fun in an environment of trust where everyone gets along is a huge accomplishment that doesn't just happen. By paying attention to the messages students were sending regarding their participation in the gym, teachers were able to create a climate that respected the student's legitimate concerns about safety. That teachers were well trained in the art of inclusion helped create this environment. They were always watching to ensure that everyone was respected and encouraged in the gym, and

would step in when a student wasn't. And, as one student said, "if they (another student) hurt me, I'd tell the teacher or something, so they wouldn't bug me."

When problems occurred, teachers first used 'time outs' to diffuse the situation. A time out required students to step to the side of the action for a short period of time in order to cool down or presumably, to reflect on what had just happened. Mostly, time outs looked like two-minute penalties in a hockey game, except they were often shorter in duration. When a problem persisted, students were sent from class and a teacher's aide notified youth care workers at the residence with details of what had happened. The quicker the issue was resolved, the quicker the student were allowed back in school.

Like the rest of the school, the gymnasium environment was framed within a climate of caring adults. Students were allowed to call their teachers by their first names, and teachers, to varying degrees, understood that the cultural landscape of their students' lives involved certain challenges;[6] many were able to deal with student *mis*-behavior (e.g., inappropriate language, aggressive behavior) in a patient and mostly non-punitive manner. This is not to say that inappropriate behavior was accepted or tolerated.[7] Rather, teachers used gentle interventions, encouragement, and positive reinforcement to increase opportunities for students to experience success (and successful relationships) in the gymnasium. They also played alongside the students, a playful interaction that was for the most part well received by the students I spoke with. The following are examples of student perceptions regarding the interaction of staff who supervise in the gym:

Student: Hmmm. Staff there. There's lots of staff around, playing basketball. With the kids, it's just *fun*. Seeing lots of people getting into something.

Student: Yeah, they encourage you. They say "you can do it". They try to get you off of your butt (laughs), in a good way saying. "Come on, you can do it. Get off, get up and try it. If you don't…if you just try it you'll like it, come on, come on." And you're "oh alright, I'll like it?"

*Joannie: What do they (teachers/teacher's aides) do to help you?*

Student: To get students to try things that they might not be good at.

A teacher's aide who had worked at the school for a number of years offered the following observation that confirmed much of what the students had expressed:

Teacher's aide: Very few don't want to come to the gym. It's the effect of the teacher, when more regimented and strict they want to attend less. We don't put stress on changing (like in a normal school); if they don't want to take part, we leave them alone for a few minutes, we don't get on their back. Most are participating.

Of those not participating, it was difficult to draw an aggregate portrait to characterize the typical non-participant. Some students suggested that the "lazy" students didn't take part, or those with low self-esteem. Others suggested that the girls were less-involved, particularly during the lunch hour activities. With fewer girls in attendance at the school, however, participation ratios were difficult to determine. Some girls

were known to be the most active in the school. What was noticeable was that the students' skill levels and abilities ran the spectrum from neophyte (never played before) to expert (played on school and community teams), which one would think would be problematic. Yet students of varying abilities were often participating side by side in the same activity.

***Lack of competence is not a bad thing, it's an opportunity to learn***

Despite the heterogeneity of their past physical activity experiences, students consistently referred to the gym as a place for everyone, where even students who were less able were welcome on the court. If it mattered to you, how well you did depended on how hard you tried. Wanting to understand this idea more, I often asked students to explain what the gym was like for those students who were less talented:

Student: (on kids who are less skilled) Oh, it doesn't matter, there's different kids at different angles. You're just pure fluke, like some guys, we just keep on passing the ball around, everyone gets a chance, that's what I notice over a couple of months now everyone gets a chance because we're in a program where you pass it and everyone gets a chance.

Student: Even if they're not good, they'll still be good, they're still learning. It doesn't matter, you just try.

*Joannie: What about the people who aren't very good at it, how do they feel about it?*

Student: They just come down and play, they give it their best.

*Joannie: They do anyways?*

Student: Yeah. That's what I think.

*Joannie: Does it matter if they're not as good as the others?*

Student: Nope.

While there most certainly must have been those who were excluded or made fun of because they weren't good, no one who I had permission to speak with said that ability mattered. In an achievement environment involving so many students who have difficulty interacting socially with their peers, how can it not matter how good you are? To understand this better, I re-visited some of the literature that calls into question the valuing of competition and positive performance outcomes.

In an article that juxtaposed the patriarchal values of individualism, winning, dominance, and affluence against Native American empowerment values of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity, Brendtro and Brokenleg (1993) question the Western priorization of ability over task mastery. They suggest that it can be delusional to expect all individuals to feel highly able and good about their personal ability, and that attention should be focused upon the task that one is to learn, such that a lack of competence can be re-positioned in our schools as an opportunity to learn. "Competition must be redefined so that one can master skills, celebrate achievement, and enjoy the spirit and company of those with whom we share the quest" (p. 9). According to these authors, we need to teach children to fail courageously, which I interpret as meaning 'to participate bravely and re-position failure as an incentive to learn'. Yet, the sporting culture is grounded in such patriarchal values as hierarchy, aggression, authority, and productivity which can also filter into many physical education programs (LeDrew, 1996). That this physical education program promoted

an alternative set of values didn't just happen; it was a conscious decision on the part of the adults who exercised power in the gymnasium. That it was so well-received by students may have had to do with the high number of Native students in the program who may have brought the cultural values of inclusion with them to the treatment center. This was an area I should have, but didn't follow-up on.

Part of the reason "it didn't matter" how good you were at Macdonald school was that the staff in charge of the programs emphasized the importance of playing 'just for fun'. The physical education teacher(s) used an evaluation system that rewarded positive attitudes and effort in a socially inclusive, fair, and flexible program where fun was allowed to take center stage. The physical education specialist explained how she had changed her philosophy since arriving at the school: "I'm less concerned with skill, with changing for class…the idea is to get moving". Two teacher's aides moved in and out of the activities, using gentle persuasion and cajoling to keep students positively focused and moving. Good sportspersonship and fair play were noticed and rewarded (e.g., through awards, acknowledgement, compliments). To be the worst player was never anything to be ashamed about. On the contrary, it was presented as an opportunity to learn and have fun.

A teacher who played basketball in the gym most lunch hours explained how the lunch time sports were set up such that it was participation that mattered, not whether you won or lost.

> Teacher: There's not a lot of risk. In other words, if I don't play as well as someone else, there's not a lot of consequence in terms of getting your esteem thrashed or getting your ego thrashed. With the

others, (the adult supervisors) the philosophy is 'play the game, enjoy it, get involved'.

*Joannie:* *So even though you don't like basketball, you still play it. What makes it fun when you play it?*

Student: 'Cause you can just be a goof. And people don't really care, cause it just looks like you're playing.

By getting involved (even if you were just goofing around) and playing lots, skill levels improved. Many students commented on their own improvement, often stating that they learned "just by watching others" who knew how to play or asking someone "how to do it." Although it was a rare occasion to see a skill lesson taught at the school, skill learning did take place, and often. Teachers and students (with their peers) used incidental teaching moments, unplanned opportunities to offer advice or provide coaching tips such as "you should try it this way" or "keep your hand up in his face."

Youth care worker: So they learn just by being around and being willing to... kids tend to learn more when they think they are not learning. So you can get a lot in by just sort of playing, having fun, and patting them on the back for nice rebounds or nice shots - stuff like that.

Student: Oh, I didn't know anything about basketball at all when I first came here, but, everybody seemed to be playing it and so I tried, now I'm pretty good at it.

Many students were able to develop a level of skill that allowed them to actively participate and enjoy the games that were being played on the court. A good reason for this was that, as stated, it wasn't a failure to perform poorly. While put-downs did occur, it was also not uncommon for students to celebrate the achievements of their peers who were new to the game or just learning.

Students were certainly provided with good role models each day as the staff "played for fun" and encouraged everyone, especially those who were new to the game. Competition provided the opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of those who were learning as opposed to the success of those who won. In many ways, the program resembled much of what LeDrew (1996) described as a play curriculum where such non-patriarchal values as inclusion, creativity, and the placing of children at the center of the teaching experience were allowed to take precedence. And, it must be remembered that this was a play curriculum for young people who had severe emotional and behavioral difficulties, children and youth for whom our society has constructed such labels as wards of the state, juvenile offenders, and delinquents. In the Macdonald gym, they were just a bunch of kids playing, and in the next section I will explore more fully other 'engaging' aspects of the physical education program.

***Physical education that is fair, fun, and flexible***

The words 'simple, structure, supervision' dominate the current zeitgeist of professional advice for educators working with students with emotional and behavioral difficulties. Similarly, a slogan might be used to sum up the Macdonald physical education program: fair, fun, and flexible. Attention to issues of fairness made the gym more fun, and students were never forced to participate, which

minimized issues of control, or lack thereof. Even the usually problematic nature of choosing sides for a game passed for the most part, uneventfully.

Student: (on picking teams) Well, they kinda' just picked themselves, and no one had a problem with that.

Student: Like, if they got a team and it's not fair like you've got six good guys and you've got six bad guys, they'll integrate them until it's a really good even two teams.

*Joannie: How about the people who aren't picked or are picked last? How do they feel?*

Student: They're....they feel okay with it. Me, I was picked last yesterday. I didn't really care...I'm usually picked last when I play basketball (this student had never played before coming to Macdonald).

Student: Some of them get mad because like the last one that's sitting there has to go with the sucky team and they get mad because they want to be on a good team.

I was intrigued by this sense of fairness, and posed the following hypothetical question to a student who was shooting baskets in the gym.

*Joannie: So...(nice shot)...if you showed up one day here at school, and none of the teachers were here, just the students. What would happen?*

Student: We would all play basketball (no hesitation answering that question).

*Joannie: And how would it get organized?*

Student: We'd probably have the biggest guys as captains.

*Joannie: Who would referee?*

Student: No one. We'd just have a decent game.

Fairness was something these students understood and were quick to comment on. When the student mentioned earlier that "we're in a program where you pass it and everyone gets a chance," he was describing one aspect of playing games that could cause lots of potential conflict. Learning not to be a ball hog was something that individual students struggled with, and in these situations, fellow students would sometimes react by excluding that player.

Student: Sometimes, the kid gets the ball and doesn't want to pass to the kid who didn't pass, so the other kid knows how it feels.

In many cases, the teacher would modify the rules to ensure everyone would touch the ball. In one game of basketball, students needed to pass the ball a minimum of three times before shooting on any basket. Games were played to three baskets, and with three teams of three rotating on and off the court, the action was fast-paced with lots of passing between all players. Although students would sometimes complain that they wanted to play "a real game," they appeared to understand that the rule changes were in place to improve everyone's participation in the game. It was part of the code of fairness practiced at the school.

Teachers often demonstrated a willingness to accommodate students' interests. The free time at the start of class allowed each individual a choice as to what to do. Free time was often followed up by a group choice of activity, which could at times cause problems when consensus wasn't achieved. Many students said that they didn't

mind which activity was played, while some "hated" one sport or another. For the most part, the program was flexible enough to accommodate diverse interests. Individual students could often opt out of the chosen group activity by, as an example, going for a walk with a teacher's aide. Providing choice worked best when the teacher would act quickly to coordinate the action. On other days the teacher would decide the group activity: although there was lots of basketball and low organized games happening over and over again, other popular activities included hockey and softball, skipping (Jump Rope for Heart) and volleyball, particularly for the girls.

The teacher's willingness to offer activities that the students preferred contradicted the wide variety of choices recommended by the provincial curriculum. One justification was a desire to see students actively participating and enjoying themselves. The flexibility of this program starkly contrasted with other school programs where teachers forced students to participate in activities they didn't like (Ennis et al., 1997 ). Ironically, one teacher in the Ennis study explained how "about 50 to 60 percent of the students at this school never get dressed. They just don't like having to play sports that they don't like. If we let them play basketball all the time, we would get 90% of them to participate" (p.62). These teachers complied with the standard curriculum, however meaningless it was to their students, which resulted in teacher-student conflict and non-participation. Conversely, the teachers at Macdonald school were open to their students' input regarding the class content, and this flexibility allowed students to exercise greater control over their physical education class. When they ran to the gym each day, part of the reason was that they knew they

could expect to have some fun doing what they liked to do and what they were getting good at doing.

While the culture of fairness and flexibility contributed to the fun that students experienced in the gym, the generous amount of time allowed for physical activity was also a key factor in promoting positive experiences and skill development. Most of the students liked the school schedule, and felt that gym time was adequate. Smaller class sizes at Macdonald allowed for greater flexibility in allowing students to have choice. They also liked the way the physical education teacher structured (or didn't structure) the class and allowed more actual activity time than in a 'regular' school (Halas & Watkinson, 1999). In other words, they were allowed to 'play'. And they were often allowed to play games of their own choosing. When everyone played together and got along, it was fun. Students improved their skills and received encouragement from their teachers, staff members, and at times, their fellow participants. They liked going to the gym; it was "fun". And in this program, with these teachers, it was fun for fun's sake. Forget the curriculum (i.e., respect the students more than the state guidelines), create a safe space and let fun happen.

**Engaging troubled youth through a gym culture that nurtures fun**

I would like to summarize the active living program at Macdonald school with an analogy to a basketball. In order to play a game, you need a ball that bounces. If there isn't any air in the ball, the ball won't bounce. At Macdonald, the staff has pumped up the basketball to full capacity by providing a safe gym, where fairness and flexibility contribute to fun, and fun is planned for and allowed on a daily basis. Without these attributes, the ball wouldn't bounce as well as it does. Negative

experiences deflated the ball. To ensure this doesn't happen, staff members at Macdonald school act as strong safety valves. If students felt less secure, they would be less willing to engage in the program. The fun-omenon of physical activity for the youth at Macdonald is predicated on a gymnasium culture that has been carefully crafted by teachers and treatment center staff working in the school. That so many students are actively choosing to participate suggests that, for these students, playtime is meaningful. As one student declared, "it's a really good, fun place to learn." In this case, fun helps and I investigate the reasons why in another paper (work in progress) stemming from this interpretive case study.

**Allowing the F** word: a few closing comments**

**on fun and games in physical education**

Just as "fuck" was a part of the students' everyday vernacular at Macdonald school, "fun" was what happened in the gym. Yet, in many physical education circles, words like 'play' and 'fun' have become four-letter 'F**' words, curricular profanities in a world of educational reform. As Lawson (1998) stated, in order to justify its presence in the curriculum, physical education is trying to keep up with the "academic Joneses", a trend that is exacting a cost on our schools, our profession, and perhaps most importantly, our most vulnerable children and their families. A current 'imitate the academics' trend is to define physical education 'outcomes' (see the curriculum guides for Manitoba, Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia, New Zealand), observable quality control measures that have become the latest yardstick with which the corporate global economy can reproduce itself through educational practice. The rhetoric surrounding 'outcome based curriculum' uses words such as 'accountability',

'standards', and 'legitimate', as in, 'making physical education legitimate' through the identification of agreed-upon standards of movement and participation. When physical educators so willingly embrace a discourse that negates the relevance of playfulness, fun also becomes the "F-word": a forbidden signifier loaded with essential meaning yet banned from the vernacular of compliant, top-down decision-makers and implementers.

As Lawson (1998) emphasized, the current flaw in physical education is its efforts to manage children's forms of play, games, exercise routines, sports, and other physical practices. (En)forced participation is regulated through external incentives, rewards, and sanctions that replicate classroom management techniques and discipline strategies. These forms of physical education allow little room for play as a voluntary, intrinsically motivated activity; instead, students are expected to adhere to and comply with a curriculum of physical activity that is mismatched with what people seek, need, and want in play and play-like activities (Lawson, 1998). When students resist this curriculum, as is the case in many schools, their resistance is often met with punishment through low grades, exclusion (e.g., being forced to sit out if not changed for class), or, 'forced' participation. The end product of this transmuted form of (en)forced play is that many students are opting out of physical education and into physical *in*activity.

Fun is not a vague concept, it has meaning and importance to children and youth (Humbert, 1995; Mandigo & Couture, 1996; Rowley, 1995), and it is beneficial to their development as human beings. Fun can influence an individual's desire to continue participation in physical activity (Mandigo & Couture, 1996). The

professionals working at Macdonald school have recognized that the young people in their care have been denied many of the basic experiences that arise from playing and just having fun. And so they allowed the f** word to happen. Unfortunately, the f-word is not so easily accommodated in regular schools, which might explain, in part, the number of students running away from the gym as opposed to it. Perhaps the lesson learned from Macdonald school is that it's time for physical educators to lighten up, subvert a little, and have some fun.

[1] I have chosen to dichotomize the following discussion for reasons of presentation. As Fenton, Frisby & Luke (1999) so effectively demonstrate, the meaning that individuals within an organizational culture (e.g., a school's physical education program) hold are multiple, fluid, and incomplete. These categories should be similarly interpreted.

[2] Of note, basketball (9%) and dodgeball (16%) were also listed in this group of students' most liked activities for contrary reasons. They liked dodgeball because they were rarely eliminated early and they liked hitting others with the ball. As for basketball, this activity was liked because they possessed good skills and handled the ball often.

[3] Social learning theory defines moral development as the extent to which individuals' behaviors conform to social convention and norms, and involves such activities as role modeling and reinforcement. Structural developmental theories focus on the social interactions experienced within an activity and the cognitive processes of reorganizing patterns of thoughts and behaviors surrounding moral dilemmas (either naturally occurring, as in cheating in a game, or artificially induced by the teacher, as in limiting equipment, thus forcing students to contemplate the aspect of sharing equipment).

[4] By whitestream, I pick up on Claude Denis' (1997) interpretation of Canada as a society of diverse socio-demographics that is based on a fundamentally white, European model.

[5] The attendance and behavior of high risk students can be quite unpredictable, making it nearly impossible to plan and maintain a detailed schedule of data collection; thus, a naturalistic inquiry suited the demands of the environment (Patton, 1990).

[6] Despite their acknowledgement that the cultural landscape had certain challenges, the teachers' understanding of their students' lives was limited because they hadn't lived their students' lives. They (like me in this study) cannot 'know' the experiences of the students.

[7] A common misconception of habilitative or special schools is that inappropriate behavior is accepted, which is not the case (Hallenbeck & Kauffman, 1996).

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# CHAPTER 6

## Playtime at the Treatment Center:

## How Physical Activity Helps[1]

### *Physical activity and troubled youth*

Hanging from the rafters in a gymnasium where an intervention program for youth at risk is run is a banner with the slogan "Overtime is better than sudden death" (Wilkins, 1997). Cryptically encoded within the metaphorical syntax of this message is an allusion to choice. Choose sports. Play basketball. Hang out in the gym cause it's a safer, better place than the street corners. Yet, what do we know about the personal relevance of physical activities for at risk or troubled youth that makes us think they might want to choose to play basketball, or some other physical activity, over the many other choices that life offers? What we do know is that an increasing number of underserved children and youth are growing up unprotected in families, communities, cultures and societies that are neglectful, abusive, and uncaring toward them (Lawson, 1998, 1997). As today's minors negotiate the day to day stresses that their young lives present them with, many young people are choosing what mainstream values consider to be deviant, delinquent, or anti-social behaviors such as alcohol and substance use and abuse, truancy, prostitution, petty crime, and gang membership. Within these types of behavior options, how do physical activities and sports fit into the picture?

I ask this question to start an analysis of my own past efforts to create a meaningful and relevant physical education program for troubled youth attending an

adolescent treatment center/school (Halas, 1998). Like other teachers who believe in the importance of physical education, particularly for marginalized school populations (see Fenton, Frisby, & Luke, 1999; Garvey & Wihak, 1994), I had arrived at the treatment center full of anticipation and ideas of how a physical education program might help the young people in my classes. At the time, I wasn't fully aware of the kinds of healthy or harmful life choices that my mostly Native and otherwise marginalized students were confronted with on a regular basis. I learnt a quick lesson.

During my first week as the new physical education teacher at the school, I was abruptly confronted by this concept of 'choice' when three of my students chose to run away, go AWOL, from my cross-country practice and their "homes" at the treatment center. When those three students tricked me by running away, their brand of resistance forced me to reflectively question many of the assumptions I held about the teaching of physical education. Immediately, I had to re-orient my ways of interacting with students as a means to better understand their particular needs and interests so that they would willingly choose to engage in my classroom activities.

The surprise of that first week when those students ran away foreshadowed the tensions that remain with me today regarding the benefits of physical activity for troubled youth. While the research literature is expanding its body of knowledge regarding the potential biological, psychological and social benefits of active living for youth in general (Strachan, 1997; Wankel & Berger, 1990), evaluation of physical activity programs serving at risk youth has thus far concentrated on the counting of participation numbers, with little attention paid toward the investigation of related psychological and social issues (Reid, Tremblay, Pelletier & McKay, 1994; Witt &

Compton, 1997). Just how relevant an option is physical activity in a cultural landscape that provides little real opportunity for individuals marginalized from the mainstream?[2] Within the context of this study, how might the benefits of physical activity (that are identified for mainstream populations) help young people who have been removed from their family, displaced from their community and cultures, then placed into a special school for individuals identified as having emotional and behavioral difficulties?

To investigate these questions, I chose to engage with students who were actively participating in their school's activities. And so, I began an interpretive case study (Merriam, 1988) investigating the experience of active living/physical education for troubled youth attending Macdonald adolescent treatment center. As I have discussed elsewhere, Macdonald adolescent treatment center offers students daily opportunities to participate in a variety of physical activity options, including daily physical education. Teachers have incorporated active living into the daily curriculum as a means to negotiate the daily tensions that arise in the school. Part of what makes the physical activity program work is the generous amount of activity time offered students (for some, a minimum of 500 minutes of activity time/week) in a physically and psychologically safe gymnasium environment. Student perceptions that the gym culture is both fair and flexible contribute to the amount of fun students are experiencing in their classes.

In this paper, I pick up where the last discussion left off and ask the question: how does physical activity and the fun students are experiencing through physical activity help the young people who attend Macdonald School? As Wessinger (1994)

remarked, there is lots of available information about what children do in physical education, but much less about what children think and feel about their experiences. In essence, this is a paper about the students who didn't go on the run from my physical education class. It's a paper about the students who enthusiastically choose to participate in the active living program at the treatment center.

***The participants in this study***

All 45 students and 12 staff members at Macdonald School were invited to participate in the study. In total, 23 students aged 11 to 17 years were able to provide informed consent, thus allowing their participation in the interviews regarding their experience of the active living program. Of these, five were female, eighteen were male, five were whitestream, seventeen were Native. Twelve were residents at the center and eleven were day students who lived in the community. Within the group, the range of time spent at Macdonald school was as little as two months and as long as three years. All the students had participated in at least one aspect of the active living program. Of the twenty-three participants, I had taught six, and two others knew me as a teacher, but had not been my student. My previous relationship with these students and my former colleagues on staff eased my way into the school. In total, 35 interviews were conducted throughout five periods of data collection that took place over two consecutive academic years (March to March).

The interviews were flexible and were structured into three parts as follows: 1) the initial, building rapport stage, 2) a second series of questions that focused upon the participant's experiences of the active living program, and 3) a third set of questions that attempted to have the participant position the physical activity experience in the

context of his or her day to day life. Each student communicated a different perspective regarding his or her own experience of the program. As interpretive inquiry, this research study sought not to validate an objective reality (such as the students' uniform experience of the program), but to create meaning and knowledge (Ellis, 1998). Consequently, the discussion to follow is *not* presented as a 'realist tale' nor a global synthesis of common themes representing the students' interpretations. Rather, I have pulled out aspects of student discourse as a means to shed some light on how the meaning of the physical activity experience may be different for young people participating at Macdonald school.

Quite like picking through a garden and looking for the most unusual or unexpected flowers, I have gathered together various examples of student interpretations as a means to inform and "transform" my own understanding of a problem (Ellis, 1998): that is, how are physical activities relevant for this group of students. As I explained to interview participants, I was asking them to help me understand what it was that they liked about physical activity at their school so that I could write a text that other teachers, in other schools, could learn from with regard to their own school programs. While adhering to and respecting a professional ethic to 'tell it right,' I recognise the fragility of what Wolf (1992) refers to as "a slender thread of trust sustaining a heavy burden of credibility" (p.59). As an ethical obligation to the research participants, I have tried my best to construct my interpretations in a reflective manner that respects the integrity of the young people whose words I am representing here.

Sanders (1996) suggests that a "new understanding" of young people's views may provide the stimulus for educators to re-orient how the physical activity experience is constructed in our gymnasiums and schools. Physical educators need to create conditions for new and improved versions of practice (Hickey, 1997). As a final product, I hope that my reconstruction of the young peoples' interpretations here will open a dialogue regarding the potential benefits of active living for troubled youth. But first, I will present an example of one boy's life to more fully situate the reader within the cultural context of the students attending the treatment center/school.

**Situating the cultural landscape of troubled youth in Canada, circa 2000**

***Who are the kids who attend treatment centers? Lester's story…***

In a highly acclaimed book titled *Flowers on My Grave* (Teichroeb, 1997), a Winnipeg journalist investigates the suicide death of a young Native boy, Lester Desjarlais. Although Lester never attended Macdonald school, his journey through the child welfare and corrections system might have easily led him to the treatment center where many Native youth like him currently reside. Lester had been born into a family of five children that over a period of many years had been rocked by poverty, family strife, sexual abuse, and little opportunity. By re-constructing the boy's genealogy within the context of the social and political history of the family's Ojibwa band in Manitoba, Ruth Teichroeb draws connections between the assimilationist (white) government policies of the past (i.e., the residential schools and subsequent child welfare system), and the present day difficulties that the Desjarlais family experienced as a Native family living in late 20$^{th}$ century Canada.

From failed marriages to neglectful parenting, Teichroeb cites the leftover trauma from the seminal abuses endured by Native people in the residential schools and/or poor foster placements as having made interpersonal relationships difficult. In Lester's case, his mother had a series of failed relationships, and in her darkest moments had relinquished the care of her children to others, including foster parents and her own grandparents. While she loved her children "fiercely", her financial and emotional resources were not sufficient to properly care for her young children. As was the case with other relatives, she eventually turned to alcohol to assuage her pain.

During this time nine year-old Lester, who was known as a fun-loving prankster, escaped his home life by hanging out with older boys who found ways to get into trouble. He began drinking heavily, using drugs, and sniffing. He was suspected of committing a series of break-ins at school. Like one of his sisters, Lester eventually ended up in a locked care facility in Winnipeg, which Teichroeb described as " a kind of jail for troubled youth."

> ...the center was used as a holding facility for children from around the province who were out of control and in danger of hurting themselves or others - a kind of unofficial jail for kids who couldn't be charged with criminal offences. Some child care workers had the training and experiences needed to cope with the residents, who were some of the most disturbed youth in the child-welfare system, but others did not. Chronic burn-out plagued workers as they tried to maintain around-the-clock control of several dozen restless teenagers at close quarters" (p. 58).

While Teichroeb writes that the facility provided an environment that had little to do with treatment, Lester's sister remarked that she found the center to be a "haven of safety," where the safe protection of adults was worth the price of the restrictive setting and routine of chores required of the residents.

Not unlike my former students, Lester was continually devising ways to subvert the system, which included running away from the locked facility. Going AWOL became "a game to the bored teenagers." Despite the efforts of the center staff, Lester and others would find ways to escape, sometimes returning on their own twenty-four hours later, hungry, tired, without money, or frightened by the violence of the streets (e.g., on one occasion, Lester witnessed a friend raping another boy).

In the year that preceded his suicide, Lester was moved into ten different "official placements", which included the treatment center, his mother's home, a group home, foster care with a Native family, a juvenile jail, and a mental health center, where he was written up as "a lonely, angry child from a chaotic family who escaped his unhappiness by abusing solvents and alcohol" (p. 61). He would need long-term, culturally relevant intensive care in order to recover from his troubled life, which in the present social and economic structure of Canada, does not exist.

***The "co-mingled" youth justice and child welfare systems: another reason it's important to keep kids in school***

I have retold Lester's story here because his life circumstances are similar to many of the young people in this study. Like Lester, these children are often removed from their homes and placed into multiple treatment and care facilities. Like Lester, many children in crisis who live in remote Native communities are sent to the

treatment center in this study. Like Lester, many resist the rigid regimes of control that are enforced at these facilities. Their resistance takes many forms, including running away, "*going AWOL.*" Like Lester, children who run from the protective walls of treatment centers are exposed to multiple risks, including the threat of sexual violation and physical violence. Many children and youth at treatment centers have tried to escape their horrible life situations through alcohol and drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, and for some, suicide. Unlike Lester, children who go on the run in the late 1990's also face the additional risks associated with organized gang activity (Macdonald, 1998; Nazur Bloom, 1996). The challenge for treatment center and school staff is to create a program that will be relevant to students, that will engage their interest such that they might choose to stay at the center where it is safer for them.

Unfortunately, efforts to engage the interests of the young people in care are problematic: funding and resources for treatment centers and foster placements in Canada are severely limited (Cornwall, 1999, Wells, 1999), thus impairing program effectiveness and leaving more children at risk, especially those who go on the run. As was the case in Lester's life, negative consequences await those who go AWOL from the child welfare system. In a rather straightforward criticism of Canada's handling of troubled youth, Judge Edwin Kimelman of the Manitoba Provincial Court (Gillis,1999) voiced concern over the rising number of troubled youth who, confronted by the absence of adequate counseling and resource programs, end up in the youth justice system. Stating that "you get a child who's on the run from a group home, and they pick that child up and bring her into court. AWOL, failure to comply. This is a

child whose been taken from her family, made a ward of an agency, and she winds up in criminal court" (Gillis, 1999, p. A5). According to one research study, 24 percent of all charges laid against females since the onset of the Young Offenders Act involve offences against the administration of youth justice (e.g., leaving a residence without adult permission, Reitsma-Street, cited in Tanner, 1996).[3]

Jails, sometimes referred to as "factory schools for criminals", often contribute to recidivism (Tanner, 1996). An increasing amount of evidence exists to illustrate that 'get tough' policies (e.g., boot camps and harsher punishment for youth) fail to combat youth crime, and in fact, may do the opposite (Rosebottom, 1999; Tanner, 1996). Meanwhile, as the number of youth receiving care from the social welfare system increases, the number of youth passing through the criminal courts also increases.[4] Poverty and in particular child poverty are on the rise in Canada at the same time that social programs are being cut by fiscally conservative, short-sighted government policies (Hubka, 1992). As more children become entangled within these systems, lack of meaningful care leaves too many unhappy children vulnerable to further incarceration or the grasp of street gangs who prey upon feelings of loneliness, isolation, and fear by providing a sense of belonging and attachment (Edmonton Police Commission, 1998).

Rather than address these vulnerable feelings through the provision of adequately funded, safe and personally relevant rehabilitative programs (e.g., drop-in centers, safe houses, counselling programs, treatment centers, youth employment opportunities), the current ascendancy of right-thinking governments usually respond with more "get tough" policies aimed at decreasing public perceptions of and concern

over (media constructed images of) "youth crime" in the neighbourhood (Tanner, 1996).[5] The cycle of concern and punitive response continues, and as Tanner concludes in his summary of the failure of "get tough" policies, "more juveniles will find themselves in the net of the juvenile justice system, thus confirming - in higher arrest rates and custodial sentences-the original fears about a growing problem of youth crime" (p.236). The result is a justice system that reproduces troubled youth and a social welfare system that is stretched to the limit trying to meet the needs of young people such as Lester Desjarlais. And so, it is within this cultural context that the following discussion of the active living program at the treatment center/school and how it helps takes place.

## The *fun* of physical activity: how physical activity helps the young people at Macdonald school

### *Playtime for big kids*

Simon is back at it, chasing up and down the sides of the rink for the puck, stopping between rushes every now and again to pull up his big, baggy pants that sag down to the knees. He playfully checks Margaret, the teacher, where ever she goes on the hockey rink, smiling mischievously as he holds her stick and kindly taunts her with a "c'mon old lady." Margaret laughs with Simon, their widening smiles stretching out across the ice as they slip and slide back and forth, calling for the puck, waiting for a break, wanting to get one more goal before the class ends. When Margaret signals the final minutes of play, the better players turn it up, racing each other to the corners, pushing harder, as the others suck in toward the net, waiting to

put their name on the perfect pass that would end the game. One last chance for fame before the gym bell tolls.

**Play time: making up for lost time**

A common perception expressed by the staff at Macdonald school is that many of their students, due to the difficulties in their lives, have "missed their childhood". I understand these comments to mean that students have missed out on opportunities to engage in healthy, playful activities in a variety of social contexts such as family get-togethers, the neighbourhood playground, school recess time or organized sports. Play experiences are thought to contribute to the social and emotional development of children, and positive competency attitudes toward physical activity and play are also seen as prime determiners of future play behaviors (Bunker, 1991; Gruber, 1986). For young people to develop positive attitudes toward play and physical activity, they first need opportunities to be playful as well as adequate amounts of play "time". With those points considered, a key educational objective at Macdonald school became the provision of time in the daily curriculum for students to engage in active living "play" opportunities. Although children's attitudes toward play are seen to be context specific (e.g., the mere presence of adults may serve as a cue for children to engage in social comparison, see Greer & Stewart, 1989), an individual's desire to be physically active is also affected by how much she or he enjoys the activity (Wankel, 1993). A key to the success of the active living program depends on how well students enjoyed the activities offered.

Creating opportunities for students to play together, have fun, and enjoy themselves can sometimes be problematic. By the time students reach the treatment

center, many are dealing with very adult-like issues in their lives. For some, their family-unit has collapsed around them. Some have been involved with the judicial system, some are receiving therapy and counseling for alcohol or drug addictions, some are known to be violent, some have worked the streets as prostitutes, and many are sexually active. Yet, for reasons I will discuss, the gym environment seems to provide a context in which these same young people can engage in playfully "fun" activities that allow them to present themselves, in a psychologically safe manner, as "kids".

One of the Macdonald students explained how many of his peers just aren't ready for "learning", and provided the following advice to teachers regarding the mindset of some students attending the school:

> Student: They're still like, they're kids. I think (it's a) state of mind. It's how you think. You can't really help them because they're at that young stupid age like and they're just dumb and silly and they're still having fun with their life. Like they think it's a joke. That's how I used to be too…. They missed out on that so they're catching up on it. That's mainly why I think there's a lot of kids that are childish. Like they missed out on that, playing with their little cars and what not. Like, what's that kid's name, he likes playing with dragons and what not.

This 15 year-old student also described how he and a teacher play at the swimming pool each week: "I'm the dolphin and he's the shark" (see table 6-1). In this example, he is incorporating imagination and role playing into his playtime, an activity that

allows him to safely re-connect with and experience child-like play. Other examples of students describing their playfulness in the gymnasium follow:

Table 6-1: The fun of physical activity for young people at Macdonald School

| **The *fun* of physical activity** | |
|---|---|
| ***Play time for big kids*** | ***Physical play is experiential, involving all the 'senses'…*** |
| "…the winter carnival was just awesome. You've got a big ski with these 6 guys on it. Me and Frank were just going away on it." | "I like it when you see the ball going through the air, and you see it come out the other side, there…you hear swish" |
| "Oh dodgeball, I love dodgeball! Running around and tryin' to dodge it… Tryin' to run around the whole gym. It's the best!" | "It just feels good after you have a game. It's fun. Less tired." |
| "Me and Frank, I'm the dolphin and he's the, like the shark that walks around, and I attack his feet all the time. I have a fun time doing that. Go on the diving board and dive around and … have a lot of fun." | "Like hearing things that people are around. If you're playing a basketball game, you're hearing for people that are calling your name." |
| | ***… and the feedback is immediate, allowing for self-correction*** |
| | "I kept on practicing for about a week and it really helped my shot." |

Student: If they're having a really good day in the gym, like, me and Peter yesterday, we had a great day, we're just bouncing off the walls, going crazy with the basketball. Really happy, yelling there…yah ha!

Student: Fun is just having a good time, good laugh, enjoying yourself, relaxing. All that put together in one.

Student: Go run all over and go crazy and everything.

Student: Well, just being with all the, all the other students and sports, um, it's fun, like you just, like sports is fun.

Going "crazy", "relaxing", "being with other students", "having a good time", are positive descriptions of the school/treatment center experience. The playtime also offers a healthy means to fun, and one would think that the greater the fun one is having, the greater the desire to engage in the activities over an extended period. Keeping young people focused on activities offered at the center is a key ingredient to keeping young people safe. At Macdonald school, the generous amount of scheduled playtime helps students connect with their school in an enjoyable, experiential manner. The experiential nature of physical activity may also explain how students feel connected to the activities in the gym, which I will explore in the next section.

***Physical play is experiential, involving all the 'senses' . . . and the feedback is immediate***

The inter-connectedness of the various senses as they are activated through physical play in the gym contributes to the holistic experience of physical activity. Students feel their bodies as they run up and down the court, they hear the chatter and cheers, their eyes are focused on the target, they smell the clouds of perspiration left hanging in the damp gym: their bodies are involved. As a fourteen year-old girl explained, "You see the ball … and hear the swish."

Part of the fun is that the sensory feedback is immediate, providing performance cues that register affective messages:

*Joannie: How does it feel to make a good hit?*

Student: Feels like I'm the best. The ball, when it goes so far past everybody, and I know I'm going to score. And I'm feeling "alright, okay." Everybody goes crazy (on my team).

Another student explained how performance feedback received in the gym differs from the classroom. As an example, performing physical skills provides opportunities for instant evaluation, and if successful, momentary gratification. The ball goes in or out, the feedback is immediate, the next shot allows self-correction (as opposed to correction by others). In the classroom, performance evaluations may not be so immediate and self-corrections not so readily applicable. In the gymnasium, the immediacy of the performance feedback provides information that can be used by the student as she or he participates:

Student: Well, you feel it because you know what you've just done instead of working on a math question and you're all frustrated and you're all oh, I can't do this, and you don't know if you've got it right or wrong so you're still frustrated. That frustration is still there. Whereas in the gym, you know you made a good shot and it's like, right on, you forget about all those angry feelings and you don't get frustrated. People like me that likes doing things and cutting wood and what not and knowing they did it right and seeing it instead of waiting until they got the teacher's marking your questions and they got it wrong and then they leave the class, like I did this wrong and that.

For students who have experienced failure in a variety of contexts, to know "they did it right" connects their participation to their performance. In addition, the

socially-interactive, performance based environment in the gym has potential to offer many "attempts" at a variety of skills. The contingencies of games can include a repertoire of motor skills (e.g., passing, shooting, running, blocking, deking, dribbling, tagging, chasing, sliding, and so forth) that provide various opportunities to succeed. If you're not good at one aspect of the game, you might be good at another. The opportunity also exists to succeed in a variety of sports, as one student explained: "Cause some kids might not feel that good at certain things, but then in other sports they're really good." Of course, participants can also experience negative affect associated with failed attempts in any activity. In a psychologically safe environment, however, students can be encouraged to use mistakes as important performance cues. These performance cues allow for self-correction of mistakes. To some, self-correcting one's own errors may be less-threatening than correction by another (as suggested by the student above who waited for the teacher's evaluation to know how he had performed on the worksheet).

Opportunities for self-correction also allow students to monitor their own improvement. Consequently, students can be encouraged, through their experiences, to connect effort with skill learning, as suggested by a student who explained how he had "practiced for a week and it really helped" his shot. By learning to read performance feedback, students can also assume greater control and responsibility for their own performance, allowing them, as illustrated in the examples below, to seek help or learn from watching others:

> Student: Well, just practicing. Going to Frank, Mary (the teachers), asking different people point of view of how to shoot a

basketball and Frank taught me how to keep your arm straight when you're shooting and it just goes right in that hoop.

Student: But when we lose, we watch the other teams lose; what teams we have to (beat) - we study the team. Learn the moves. Try to study the moves and I don't know.

Student: Well, basketball - we have a team, a good team like Bobby and Kevin. You go play – you gotta' know how to … go up to the good places. And pass the ball and get right to the net.

The body can interpret performance as well: a tired body, sore muscles, bruises from a dive for the ball are all indicators of effort expended in a game or activity. Other comments expressed by students that speak to the bodily perceptions of physical activity follow:

Student: It just feels good after you have a game. It's fun.

*Joannie:* *Do you feel more tired or less tired after you finish phys. ed.?*

Student: Less tired.

Student: It feels good too, and kind of up-lifting, even if you can feel good for five minutes after a game, it still pays off.

When a student feels "up-lifted" after a physical education class, a real sense of connection to what has been experienced in the class is created. While the physical/body senses might be employed during the activity itself, the other 'senses' kick in as an outcome of the experience. It feels good to expend energy, a 13-year old explained, "Cause then you feel calm and relaxed like half an hour later." In the

following section, I will present different ways in which the spirit might be "up-lifted" as students experience belonging and accomplishment through their active participation in the gym.

**Making connections.... a - "scent" of belonging**

Attachment needs are considered to be very real for many troubled youth who have experienced a series of broken social bonds in their lives (Brendtro & Long, 1990). Similarly, treatment center residents who are displaced from their families and communities while attending Macdonald school can wake up to very real feelings of loneliness and isolation. For some, the treatment center may be one of multiple placements they have lived through within a short period of time. For these young people, pervasive loneliness can be a feeling that is difficult to escape. Making positive connections is not always easy, particularly for those individuals who struggle in social situations with their peers. In this regard, making 'healthy' connections with other students and staff members at the school is considered to be a means to help ease feelings of isolation.

At Macdonald, teachers and staff make perspicacious use of the gymnasium in order to encourage students to connect with each other through playing games and participating on teams. This process, which I have discussed elsewhere, appears to be effective for some students.

*Joannie:* *So, and I guess I want to know, how long did it take you, and what helped you to feel settled in and made you feel at home here?*

Student: I don't know. Get to know the people right away.

*Joannie:* *Yeah. And what activities helped you get to know people?*

Student: Basketball. Like coming over here and playing basketball at lunchtime. Got to meet more people. It gives you a feeling of belonging. You're part of something.

One day during my fieldwork observations I decided to look more closely at what this student meant by a "feeling of belonging." As the student above explained, by playing in the gym you get to meet people and "you're part of something."

In order to understand this process more fully, I began to look more closely at the social exchanges occurring between students on the court. The first set of exchanges I considered was the ritual of dividing participants onto teams, which for the most part, passed uneventfully at Macdonald school. The picking of teams can be a threatening experience for many students in physical education classes; imagine what it might feel like to be new to the center, to not know anyone, and to be amidst other students who you don't know while you wait to "hear" your name called out by a teacher or team captain. A scary feeling, one would think, but what might be gained by this public acknowledgement of your presence as an entity within the group?

To be picked, you are no longer an un-known. You have a name, and as you step forward to take your place on a team, you are "a part of something". As odd as it might seem, numerous students explained how, when choosing teams, they preferred not to be captains because they liked "being picked." "*You feel wanted,*" a student explained, in what I began to see as a "scent" of belonging. "It's nice to the ears." The distinctive ring of your name as it is called out loud lingers momentarily, drawing

you onto a team, hinting in an agreeable way that you are connected to something. That you belong! Perhaps for some students, the chance to hear your name called and "feel wanted" was a faint part of the attraction of the gymnasium? With this in mind, I went looking for other *scents* of attraction that drew students to the socially-interactive gym.

I began to look more closely at how the structure of different games necessitated or enabled a communicative social interaction between students. As examples, students called out each others' names to make connections for a pass, to warn of on-coming danger, to congratulate a good play, to instruct player strategy and so forth. As the teams changed from day to day, students were confronted with the challenge of relating to new teammates. When I talked to the students about this, I was told how on the basketball court, "You've got kids you may have never talked to before calling your name." One could say that a type of en-forced complicity was occurring, as exemplified by the student who suggested that "you have to be friends" with your teammates or you can't win (see table 6-2). And the teammates were always changing, allowing new possibilities, and the potential to create new relationships and friendships (particularly, as one boy explained, when you perform well).

> Student: Yeah, cause like, say if you don't score baskets that much…(uh huh) … you get like a really lucky one, and then everybody is all, hanging around you and stuff…

Table 6-2: Making connections between the "senses" through physical activity

| **Making connections between the "senses"** | |
|---|---|
| ***A-scent of " belonging"*** | ***A chance to celebrate accomplishment*** |
| "Yeah, you feel like you're a part of a group." | "It's just good to know that you got something going. People are cheering you on." |
| "Basketball, gotta' pass the ball. There's a lot of passing. A lot of teamwork. A lot of scoring. A lot of compliments." | "They score, "YEAH!!" (laughs) High fives, they like walk up to you, and give you that look…you're the best, you're the best." |
| "Playing on a team you have to be friends with them or you can't win." | "Yeah. I scored a goal, my friends, like the first goal I scored in that three years, my friends all started jumping all over." |

Student: You have a lot of guys that like you and they respect you, they're like, "alright!" and "right on, man" (slaps hands like a high five), "yeah, you're the best, you're the best." Me, Eddy and, uh, we're just the best team in, and just "yeah, right on". Joey can almost slam.

Student: Well, I didn't really like gym 'cuz I'm shy, I didn't really know anybody, and if they thought I sucked or something. I was kinda' shy at first. So I didn't really say much and I didn't really get involved, but once you start meetin' people it gets a lot funner in phys. ed.

Student: Cause I know where he's going to be at one time and he knows where I'm going to be at that time…so, I can fake the shot, I can pass right there, he'll be standing there waiting for the ball.

One day as I watched two students communicate aspects of game strategy through an exchange of body signals (i.e., a head fake that said "go up to the good places"), I remembered my own past play and game communications with students on the court. Time and again, playing games together allowed me to establish relationships with students on the court that quite often carried over once the game ended. I recall how receiving a series of volleys from one of my more difficult-to-get-to-know female students felt like a communication breakthrough. As the number of our successive volleys increased, we became complicit in a shared challenge: we had to work together to succeed, and when we did, we made eye contact afterward to acknowledge our own understanding of the accomplishment. When this particular exchange ended, we knew each other differently. The next time we met it was outside of class, and we quietly nodded to each other a "good game, eh?"

Perhaps there is more to the fleeting temporality of the social contacts made on the court? However brief, the communications are very real and experiential; physical, verbal, and gestured socio-emotional contacts that establish connections between students, their participation in the gym, their performance, the feedback received from others and the way they were made to feel:

Students: Well, it helps, when I get a basket it makes me feel good cause I know I'm helping out my team. And I feel good for getting the basket.

These ideas might best be summed up by two male students who described how physical activities "just gets the self-esteem up and they, they really like it" … "cause you feel it more."

***The structure of games and the public celebration of accomplishment***

Earlier I described how one student compared performance feedback in the gymnasium to the classroom, stating that participating in physical activities allowed for self-correction as opposed to correction by the teacher. This immediate performance feedback also allows for a public acknowledgment of success, which, as one student remarked, is "nice to the ears". As I listened to students describe their participation experiences and watched them participate in activities, I began to notice how much more actual 'celebrating' was going on in the gymnasium as compared to the classroom. I had initially attributed this phenomenon to the students' cultural perception of the gym as a "cool" place, where the value of good performance was an accepted truth of the sporting discourse. Celebrating accomplishment between students was a culturally acceptable thing to do in the gymnasium. As I continued to examine different layers of student (and teacher) discourse around performance, a contrast began to emerge between how achievement was celebrated in the gymnasium versus the classroom.

The textual descriptors in table 6-2 illustrate how students would cheer each other on, compliment good play, or "give you that look" that says "…you're the best." The act of acknowledging good performance included such body contact gestures as high fives, "pats on the back," and verbalizations like "that was a good game." When scoring a basket, as the student explained, it feels good because you know you're

helping out your team. The cooperative structure of team play in games encourages the sharing of performance success because each person's performance affects the team's success. The students and I discussed how they would never get a high five for scoring well on an academic test, but scoring a goal in the gym was alright, "other kids won't get mad."

*Joannie:* *... like when you get a good basket, you're allowed to celebrate it, eh?*

Student: Yeah, other kids won't get mad.

*Joannie:* *Yeah. It's different, eh. Like if you brag in the classroom, what happens?*

Student: Other kids get really mad and stuff.

Although the use of cooperative learning tasks in the classroom should stimulate similar types of group experiences of success, achieving success academically wasn't as easily accomplished for this group of students. This might explain, in part, why scoring well on an academic test made "other kids get really mad and stuff."

Perhaps one explanation that success in the gym was more acceptable than the classroom was because, for Macdonald students, success in the gym was also more accessible. For young people who struggle academically (a majority of students at Macdonald), the physical education class might provide opportunities to succeed (or not succeed) on a different level. Although educators have expressed the belief that physical activity and sports provide an excellent means for behaviorally and academically challenged students to experience success and raise their self-esteem (e.g., see Nobes, 1998), a teacher from Macdonald school raised an interesting

observation regarding the self-esteem of students participating in the gym versus the classroom. According to this teacher, performance deficits are more noticeable in the classroom than in the gym. This observation rather ironically contradicts the widely-held belief (among physical educators) to the contrary: that is, the overt nature of performance in the gymnasium is often considered to accentuate mistakes as compared to the more 'discreet' classroom environment. The visible nature of performing a motor skill in front of others is thought to more vulnerably expose a student's self-esteem to 'public' criticism. Yet, according to this teacher, the opposite appears to be the case for those students who struggle academically:

> Teacher: And again that's not so much in Macdonald, but I've noticed in other schools, but certainly kids that have trouble academically, their differences, their deficits, can really show up in a classroom. If you can't read or you can't read as well as somebody, that shows up a whole lot more than if you miss one basket. I don't know. … So I think that they don't necessarily stick out, well, I suppose maybe some of them do if they really aren't phys. ed. kids and they feel uncomfortable in the gym, but I think generally speaking they have a lot of success. Some of the kids that are the worst academics are probably the most successful in the gym.

As already mentioned, the opportunities to experience 'small' successes and defeats (e.g., a good pass, a bad pass) are many within the game, allowing students with a variety of skills to blend into the group activity.

When I asked a student to help me understand the difference between learning in the classroom versus the gymnasium, his answer once again pointed to the immediacy of the performance feedback that enables students to monitor their progress.

*Joannie:* *Is it easier to learn a motor skill than it is (a skill) in a classroom?*

Student: Oh yeah. For me it is. I don't know. Maybe for other people -- for other people it's the other way around, like they know they got the answer to the question so that's what keeps them motivated in their work.

Other comments reinforced the idea that skill learning and improvement were accessible outcomes in the gym.

Student: Yeah. I didn't have a lot of (basketball) skill when I showed up here, but now I do.

Student: I was practicing on my shots, to get them in the net, cause when I came I had no good shot, and I started practicing and I had a good shot after awhile.

As a summary, then, part of what makes the gymnasium climate attractive to students is their experiences of belonging and accomplishment. When performing provides feedback for self-correction, improvement can be self-monitored. When monitoring their own performance feedback, students exercise greater control over their learning environment. Many of the Macdonald students were able to make connections between participation and effort and their own improvement; when they

experience a sense of accomplishment that is celebrated publicly by others, the learning environment becomes more positive. It is acceptable to celebrate accomplishment in the gym with your peers, particularly in a team context, which allows students to experience the development of social bonds that have the potential to carry over to other areas of the school and treatment facility. These connections may be part of what makes the physical activity experience at Macdonald school an attractive option for students. Like "ants to sugar", many are drawn to the gym because they know there is something fun and good about what happens in the games that are played.

**The rhythms of playtime**

Between plays on the volleyball court, the girls dance and move their bodies to the loud 'girls' music blasting from the tape deck. Across the net, the boys energetically run and wrestle each other, stopping to karate kick the air or colorfully posture amongst themselves. Albert is playing for the first time in his life, and every time he makes a play Ron, the teacher's aide, cheers him on with a big, gentle voice. All the kids are laughing, giggling and goofing around. Michelle winces a muted *'fucking light'* when she hits the ball into the ceiling which droops over the play like a low-hanging cloud. Cathy turns to look at Margaret's response to the swearword and grins, putting her hands over her mouth to cover an amused smile. Ever cognizant of the others, Michelle walks by the net and runs her finger through the mesh, looking over at each one of the boys on the other side of the court. Eddie and Earl take consecutive turns hitting the ball too hard, and Margaret yells, "Whoa…..too many muscles, what'd you have for breakfast?" in a practiced way of downplaying mistakes.

Angela gets down low to dig up the balls launched from the other side, then rubs her forearms and looks at Margaret, who says, "Good get, Ang." Angela plays with a cool, almost serene 'matter of fact' style…makes a good serve, does the ritual high five, and barely smiles. Just looks calm and in control. As the game goes on, the girls are still dancin' and the boys are wrasslin'; the contrast in how their bodies are expending this morning's energy is very noticeable, visual, aesthetic.

***When playing lifts up the spirit: "Positive energies" that circulate in the gym***

Feeling up-lifted, hearing your name called out for a pass, scoring a basket, making an excellent move to beat the defender, laughing, making contact through a high-five, hearing everyone clap for you and cheer you on are all examples of the types of "positive energy" that circulate regularly in the gym. By "positive energy", I refer to the expression of intense positive emotions that are spirit-enhancing. As I spoke with students, I began to see how they interpreted the benefits of these positive energies in ways I had never really considered. For many students, particularly those who present as highly energetic, angry, or depressed, participating in physical activities allowed a certain flow and transformation of energies that affected their moods as they came and went from the gym (see table 6-3).[6]

As a starting point, it appears that fun works as a positive energy in the gym, allowing students to experience feelings "other to" the negative emotions they regularly deal with. A female student rather succinctly referred to negative emotions as "garbage … anything that makes you unhappy or sad." By engaging in physical activities, attention can be diverted from the sad or unhappy issues that students face

Table 6-3: The circulation of energies through physical activity

| **The circulation of energies** | |
|---|---|
| ***A positive energy*** | ***… replaces anger and other negative energies*** |
| "Gives me a chance to swim around and burn off some energy and just, have some fun with the other kids, and the other teachers." | "Like the anger management reasons why and stuff. Cause it helps the kids, like for me, helps to relieve my stress, helps me to feel a little bit better, and you get to take it all out on the court." |
| "Because it makes everyone happy." | |
| "…if I play basketball it takes my mind off most the other things (yeah) and then it just helps me, like, relieve my anger and my stress, a lot, so I won't think about anything else. So, that's the way I do it." | "Instead of…it goes out in anger, it goes out in good stuff, in basketball". |
| | "That's one of my reasons for working out, gets rid of the stress…" |
| "Well, it's a good way to blow - if you're energetic, yeah, I, I felt kind of...well, if I have a good, good time in gym and I sweat lots, I feel, kinda' good, but I feel dirty, but - I dunno, it's alright." | "It helps you with your anger, cause it burns energy, and it can help you with your anger." |
| | "A chance to let off steam. Just like, like, after schoolwork, just like during lunch and all that, come down here, blow off some steam, have some fun and all that. Cause I won't like, take all my anger out on everybody else, I come down here and play." |

daily in their troubled lives to the more positive events happening around them in the gym.

> Student: It (physical education) also helps people at Macdonald cause, personally we have problems, and uh, they're not concentrating on their problems, they're concentrating on a good game, being

athletic, having FUN, so they're not worried about anything else that goes wrong.

Student: Yeah, everybody just forgets about everything, just like, has fun …

The demands, challenges, and "fun" associated with various games and activities attracted the students' attention such that they could experience some relief from their worries. The stress of their life is temporarily put aside through a process of "self-forgetfulness" (see Ellis, 1993) that occurs when students have "fun" while participating.

Apparently, having "fun" in the gym has benefits that extend beyond simple "self-forgetfulness." Fun is seen by some as a positive energy that helps "angry" students "get rid of their anger." When I asked one student to picture himself down in the gym and to describe whether the gym was a place with a positive, negative, or neutral energy, his response helped explain how energy transformations occur:

Student: Uh, negative and positive. Like you can go down there and just have plain fun, and then you can go down there, be angry, and then get rid of your anger. Like, I've done that so many times, "ah, I'm pissed off" and I'll like, "okay, I'll be with these guys" and then I end up having fun. I'll go out the gym all happy and "oh right on, I won". Being buddies with everyone. When I went down there all angry, just like with everyone that I've seen, and I go up there … happy, so, and then you come out happy…

In the example above, anger is transformed into feelings of happiness through a process of being with others, having fun, and in this case, winning. Boredom too can "slip away," as the student further explained:

> Student: Because it (the gym) lets you get out all that, like that boredom out of your head, like you're thinking boredom, "oh, whatever, what a boring day." And then you get in the gym and it sort of slips away. Like some people are mad and they go play and then they score and someone gets them a cheer and it might cheer them up. Like when someone cheers them on they might get happy or something. You have fun and then - it brings your self-esteem up in a way so then you're ready to go on in the day.

Again, connections are made between playing, scoring, being cheered on, having fun, and bringing the self-esteem up "so then you're ready to go on in the day."

Other students described similar experiences whereby their own negative feelings were also affected by playing in the gymnasium.

> Student: An example? When me, Timmy, Simon, and Troy are on the same team, and we smoked everybody. Just like 8 games in a row. Went down there in a bad mood and came out in a good mood. Cause me and Troy are unstoppable when we're on the same team. Like we can beat the staff, me and him, against the 3 staff, we can still beat them…
>
> Student: … if you focus it positively, uh and you get like a couple of baskets, a swish or something - that energy turns into - that

bad energy turns into good energy when you - as soon as you realize that swishes are good you got like, you don't need to be (mad at) anything else, 'cuz you just got a bunch of good shots.

The transformation is experiential and for some, can have positive carry-over effects beyond the temporary confines of the gymnasium walls. The positive energy from the physical activity experience flows with the student into the next class, which, according to this student, helps them to perform "work" in the classroom. In this regard, physical activity breaks the tension of the class.

Student: Oh yeah, it goes up into the classes. Like you go up happy, instead of, "Oh, .... what a terrible game that was"...instead they go up there and "Oh that was a lovely game, man, do you know how many baskets I made?" oh and it goes up into a positive and they do good work, and that's what I think.

Student: So, if you put phys. ed. in there it gives them a break to do some other thing, then they come back (to class) and they say, okay now, it's time to work, let's go to work.

***"...a physical way of feeding your spirituality"***

One of the classroom teachers who took students down to the gym on a daily basis also remarked on the process by which being physically active expends energy, but gives energy back as well. In what he describes as a "physical way of feeding your spirituality," this teacher highlights the good fit between the students' needs for stress release and the instantly gratifying experience of playing physically.

Teacher: So I have a feeling that what it really is, is a transfer from the physical to the spiritual or the emotional. So you're giving a physical energy out and what you're getting back is, it's feeling and giving strength, emotions, spiritual…because it helps to remove stress, it helps to do a whole bunch of things. It's a physical way of feeding your spirituality. And I think that for these kids, because there is such a need for activity and for something instant…athletics and uh, that physical expression is the fastest way to feed their spiritual selves. … So, it's a feeding – feeding system, it's like a circle. So the body gives of its energy, and the spiritual/emotional side of you gets energy from it. And it gives it back to the physical body.

This idea of energy moving and being inter-connected runs parallel to traditional Aboriginal ideals of harmony and balance, whereby "…all things are connected and all things are constantly in motion, just as the energy of life is constantly moving and changing" (Garrett, 1996). As Garrett explains, the traditional "Circle of Life" represents the four sacred components of life – spirit, natural environment, body and mind, and their interdependence. As such, the physical is intricately related to the wholeness of the person within the environment. At Macdonald school, the opportunity to be physically active, often and on a daily basis, provides a metaphorical energy conduit enhancing the inter-connectivity of the emotions, the body, the mind and in essence, the spirit.

***Physical activity and the angry spirit…***

Each student's understanding of their own anger and how it was or was not expressed through physical activity revealed an interesting aspect of the physical activity experience for Macdonald students: those who identified themselves as 'angry' were the individuals most likely to agree with the statement "the gym helps me with my anger". The student who said he goes down to the gym to "let off steam" also characterized himself as "easy to set off." The student who first commented that "instead of … it goes out in anger, it goes out in good stuff, like basketball" later reflected on those comments by indicating that he used to be angry "a lot" but now "I can't really see myself being angry anymore." This student felt that he had matured and that life was falling into place for him. Like other students who used alternative methods to deal with their anger (e.g., "I like being by myself, just thinking"), this student felt he had developed other skills and techniques that enabled him to get along better with his peers. The cathartic release of anger through physical activity (as it was formerly experienced) was now less important for him. After listening to these students, it would seem that for the gym to help with your anger, you need to be angry. This interpretation might partially explain why anger release does not often appear as an important element of the physical activity experience for students participating in other more mainstream school physical education programs (see Humbert, 1995; Rowley, 1996).

Many of the students at Macdonald receive anger management counseling as part of their individual treatment plan at the center. Perhaps for this reason alone it should not be surprising that a number of students had the vocabulary from which to

identify anger as an integral aspect of their physical activity experience.[7] Anger management therapy often takes the form of cognitive-relaxation coping skills or social skills training (Defenbacher, Lynch, Oetting, & Kemper, 1996), where students are taught applied relaxation strategies, attitude-change techniques, and positive social skills in order to alter cognitive, emotional, or physiological elements of anger, thus allowing them to better deal with conflict situations and disagreements. At Macdonald school, the anger management counselor would often use a physical activity setting from which to teach students how to recognize the physiological symptoms of anger (e.g., increased heart rate) and how similar symptoms are experienced as a result of physical activity. This type of counseling and training may have contributed to the strong associations that some students made between playing and releasing their anger.

**Connectivity: how physical activities help at school and in life**

In a seminar presentation, Gerry Craig, a Jamaican artist and educator made the comment that "if you are channeled into forms of expression, you can deal with violence" (personal communication, 1998). A few years ago, the teachers at Macdonald school revised the curriculum to enhance the active living opportunities at the school. They made room/cleared time in the school day for more choice, and allowed students to opt in to physical activities for as much as 140 minutes each day (and sometimes more). Many students have responded by actively choosing to participate in the gymnasium, which, as I alluded to at the onset of this paper, is a safe and healthy choice for young people to make.

By unpacking and analyzing aspects of the students' discourse surrounding their physical activity experience at the school, I have attempted to understand more fully what it is that sustains the participation of so many students in the active living program. In particular, I have tried to show the relevance of physical activities by connecting the dots between the physical and the socio-emotional as they are experienced through playfulness and play. Yet, as conventionally hopeful as the words and images I have presented in this and other analyses may sound, I still wonder how enduring, concrete, and instrumental are the effects of the healthy physical activity experience in the troubled lives of the young people who spoke to me in this study?

Physical activities at this school might provide a "scent" of belonging and accomplishment that, like the smell of a wood fire warming a cool night pulls students toward the gym in anticipation of fun to happen. When the potential benefits of the student's physical activity experience are considered within the contextual realities of their troubled lives, we are constantly reminded that play and playfulness as a remedy, however healing, is highly contextual, and for the most part, sadly unsustainable. Although one student explained that physical activities are "…better than, like being in that gang stuff, it helps you belong in like good ways, and not being involved with all that bad stuff," to grimly juxtapose school sports versus gang involvement is a sad indicator of today's society. As educators, we must remember that the complexities of each individual's life situation is such that the lasting benefits of any intervention program depend on the contingencies of the outside world.

But this paper wasn't about outcomes; rather, it was a discussion about the process of "how" the gym helps young people whose life circumstances parallel those

of a growing number of young people, who, like Lester Desjarlais, have been left marginalized and powerless in a (dominant) Canadian society that abuses and neglects young children. Unfortunately, our society continues to force our troubled children and youth to make (the absurd!) choice between inadequate care/education and gangs or jail. At this treatment center/school where student resistance continues to manifest as children going on the run, using the attraction of physical activity to help keep kids interested in school remains an important educational choice. If we can better understand the process by which play and playfulness contribute toward a healing culture at the treatment center, then perhaps our educational programs for troubled youth will become more relevant. Perhaps we will have fewer students going 'on the run' from our programs.

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[1] A version of this chapter has been submitted for publication in the Avanté journal.

[2] In the federal government's national study of the *Benefits of physical activity and recreation on Canadian youth at risk* (Reid et al., 1994), focus group results from meetings that took place with youth across the country highlighted the need for full service drop-in centres for ages 12-25 that would provide educational opportunities, a health clinic, a residence, employment and parenting workshops/assistance, child care facilities, a coffee shop, counseling services followed by a variety of recreational services (e.g., arcades, skateboard area, weight room et cetera). Focus groups with Native youth indicated the need to host youth conferences, increase employment opportunities, and raise awareness about their culture.

[3] If leaving supervision would be categorized as an adult/institutional problem and not childhood crime, youth crime records could be cut by 24%.

[4] In Manitoba, Native youth are particularly vulnerable to these realities. Although Native people are 13 percent of the population, they are 50 percent of the welfare cases, 78 percent of children apprehended and 78 percent of youth in custody (Province of Manitoba, cited in Maunder, 1998).

[5] As an example, Gary Filmon's Conservative government in Manitoba, on the eve of an election, announced that it will be directing millions of dollars toward the hiring of 40 more police officers for the gang-vulnerable core area of Winnipeg (Government of Manitoba, 1999). Forty more $30,000-50,000/year police officers will be invested with the duty of "scaring gang members" off the streets and into provincial jails. Imagine how that money could have been used to create real jobs for young core area residents to work, as an example, in neighbourhood drop-in centers.

[6] The study of the flow and transformation of energy in a system is also referred to as energetics (ITP Nelson, 1997).

[7] Anger has been described as arising out of situations where one is made to feel unable by another (Stivek, 1979). For many young people at treatment centers, significant others in their lives (e.g., parents, family members, friends, teachers) have made them feel unable over the course of many years.

The experience of pervasive school failure can bring angry feelings to the forefront in school settings, affecting a student's disposition the minute she or he comes into contact with the familiar "context" of their frustration.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

**The dead call us to remember…**

(bell hooks)

> This work is dedicated to all those students that we as adults don't reach – the ones we lose even temporarily to despair, to drugs and alcohol, violence, to jail and the ones we have lost so finally to suicide. This work is presented in the hope that the hard lessons they have learned and which they have left for us will improve our work as teachers enough that others will choose to continue the journey.
>
> Dedication in the book *Making the Spirit Dance Within, Joe Duquette High School and an Aboriginal Community*

About three quarters the way through the writing of this dissertation, I experienced what I thought was a transforming revelation, the "aha…" that said, "Hey, stand back and look at this differently." The "aha" happened as I was trying to re-work the quote "overtime is better than sudden death", the metaphorical slogan I used at the start of chapter six, the one that suggests, "Choose sports, it might keep you alive." One day I took a step back from these words that for so long had framed what I believed to be an essential element of this study and a potential benefit of the physical activity experience. I had been introduced to the mythology of similar slogans (e.g., "Into sports, out of courts") as an undergraduate physical education student and had promoted similar "truths" throughout my teaching and more recent research career (Halas, 1997; Halas, 1994). In fact, I had hoped (and still hope) that the results from this interpretive case study will help drive the service industry that

promotes the use of physical activity, games, and sports as a means to attract kids away from the dangers of living in and interacting with present day society.

One day as I struggled to find the correct vocabulary to express my thoughts, the words "overtime is better than sudden death" took on an absurdity that I had never before considered. Why should kids be playing sports to stay alive? Aren't physical activities just for fun, for fitness, for play, for socializing, for burning off energy, for making healthy use of our leisure time? What is going on when a school offers its students ample opportunity to be physically active as a means to increase attendance and good behavior in the classroom, with the hope of keeping them from exercising resistance by 'going on the run'? As service providers, do we ever stop to ask "why" we are asking our children and youth to make these kinds of choices?

When I started to look at that metaphor differently, I began to understand more succinctly what Joey might have meant when he looked at me in that first week in our physical education class and wrote the words "fuck this shit" on the orienteering worksheet I had given him (see chapter one, Halas, 1998). At the time, I simply gave him another worksheet and asked him to express his anger more "appropriately." Having had the opportunity through this research to explore more fully the socio-cultural landscape of Joey and everybody else, particularly my Native students, I now better understand and value the lament that says, regarding culturally insensitive education, regarding assimilation, regarding poverty, regarding racism, regarding good intentions gone bad, regarding a child growing up poor in Manitoba at the turn of the 21st century, "fuck this shit." Student resistance is a cue for teachers to step back and take a hard look at what their discursive practices are doing to their students. Perhaps

the lesson I have now learned is that our role is not to teach students how to express their anger more "appropriately" but more effectively.

In this research story, I have tried to show how active living, physical education, and physical activity offer a varied range of benefits for the students attending the treatment center (for a more complete summary of the research project, see appendix A). Teachers use physical activity to negotiate the daily tensions that are played out at the school. Treatment center staff organize lunch hour basketball every day as a means to keep students positively connected to the institution. Individual students choose to participate in activities that are personally relevant: for some, the gym provides an opportunity to blow off steam, for others, they just like having fun or "being a goof" on the basketball court. The flexibility of the program allows students to exercise power in choosing how to participate without feeling pressured to take part when they don't want to or feel unsafe. The physical education program is structured to promote student participation through encouragement (from teachers) and a marking system that rewards good effort and positive attitudes.

Unlike other more restrictive/habilitative schools, this school incorporates active living as an integral aspect of what a nurturing and relevant curriculum is for all its students. Part of the reason active living plays an important role in the day to day going's on at the school is that physical activity appears to be a contextually-responsive means to engage students in this cross-cultural school program. Although a majority of the students at the treatment center in this study were Native, many students were non-Native, as was the majority of the teaching and treatment center staff. Despite the diversity of student background, the shared cultural landscape of the

young people was that they had all experienced some kind of hardship in their life. Many were lonely, frustrated, and had experienced much failure in their previous schools: for a variety of reasons that I have tried to illustrate through stories and interpretive themes, the use of physical activity throughout the school day was relevant to the culture of this group of troubled youth at the center. At this point, I feel comfortable drawing the conclusion that physical education/activity contributed in large part to the climate of the school.

An example of a culturally relevant school that effectively meets the needs of its student population is Joe Duquette High School in Saskatchewan (Haig-Brown et al, 1997). Joe Duquette is a school for Native students where aboriginal spirituality guides a program that focuses on healing and healthy lifestyles first and academics second. By reconnecting students with their own cultural traditions, Joe Duquette provides a space where students can feel at home and be respected for both who they are and where they are in life. The homogeneity of the almost all-Aboriginal population facilitated the school's efforts to deliver a meaningful cultural program. Yet, the tension always existed between the school as a healing place and the school as an academic institution.

Despite what might be called an "active living success story" there is a never-ending tension at the treatment center/school as well. The tensions here revolve around the sustainability of the successful outcomes experienced at the treatment center and in the gymnasium. Certainly the active living program is an asset for many students; at the closing moments of this research project the school had engaged a full-time physical education teacher for the first time in its history. When I spoke with the

school secretary about this latest alteration of the school program, she remarked how "the kids just love the gym." The students love playing in the gym, the teachers respond by making the active living program a focal point around which all of the students, with their diverse backgrounds and needs, can participate. It is a nice story, but as I said before, without a happy ending.

When students continue to choose to run away from their treatment center/school, as happened to me on that first Friday afternoon, they are sending a message that what is being offered is somehow inadequate. When students continue to succeed at the treatment center, then return to the same conditions that led to their needing treatment, we, as professionals, need to re-think the way we so unproblematically participate in maintaining those conditions through our own daily practices. What is the treatment center/school doing to equip students with the skills to negotiate the hardships of the real world waiting for them outside the walls of gymnasium and school? How many young children and youth will we lose due to our inability to create the social and economic conditions that allow them to exercise hope in their lives? When I think of all the students who took off from our programs and were never seen again, I search for the lessons they have left for us so that we "will improve our work as teachers enough that others will choose to continue the journey" (see dedication above).

Listen to your students, and when they look at what you're offering and reply with a very matter of fact "fuck this shit", try and find out what you can do better. Keep searching for a new vocabulary that will improve the ways by which we can understand, interact with and discuss the discourses that are impacting upon the lives

of troubled youth. As examples, find ways to disrupt the harmful "truth claims" surrounding issues of race, youth crime, and the treatment of Native youth in off-reserve, non-Native institutions. If I have learned anything from this research project, perhaps this PhD will allow me to express my own anger around these issues more effectively. In so doing, perhaps I will find my own way of exercising hope with regard to my continued work with troubled youth.

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## APPENDIX A

## THE ACTIVE LIVING PROGRAM AT MACDONALD TREATMENT CENTER/SCHOOL: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Treatment Center/School profile:**

- Macdonald School is associated with Macdonald Adolescent Treatment Center, an urban, residential treatment facility that offers counseling for physical, emotional and sexual abuse, anger management, alcohol and substance abuse, and where necessary for the safety of the client, secure supervision in a locked facility.
- Macdonald School offers a "more restrictive environment" that has as its primary goal to re-connect students with a school environment.
- The school population includes 45 residential and day treatment students, aged 10-17 years.
- The school population may turn over as much as 2-3 times in one academic year.
- The socio-demographics of the resident population includes representation across the socio-economic and racial strata; however, the majority of children and youth at the center are of Native heritage.
- A lack of local, culturally-based treatment facilities available in Native communities results in the displacement of many Native students from their home communities to the treatment facility.
- The majority of the school and treatment center staff (including 12 teaching and support staff in the school) are of middle class, white, European (i.e., whitestream) heritage.
- Students "going on the run" from the treatment center is an important safety issue at the center.

**Student profile:**

- Many students have a long history of school failure, compounded with difficulties in other areas of their life, resulting in a very negative attitude toward learning and school in general.
- Many students have been identified as having severe emotional and behavioral difficulties, including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Conduct Disorder, Depression, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Effects, and so forth.
- Many students have been involved with the youth justice system.
- Initially, students present as angry, frustrated, distrustful of adults, impulsive, and as having very poor self-esteem.
- Average school attendance is 75%, which includes days absent due to counseling sessions, treatment plan meetings (e.g., meeting with a social worker), appearances in juvenile court, and home visits.

**School curriculum profile:**

- The academic program provides basic literacy and math skills training.
- The life skills program includes woodworking, cooking, life skills training, building and maintaining a greenhouse, building a repertoire of recreational activity skills, doing volunteer work.
- The active living program includes daily physical education and physical activity options.
    - In Canada, *active living* is defined as a way of life in which physical activity is valued and integrated into daily life.

**Active living profile: How the program works**

- The school offers 700 minutes of physical activity time per week, or 140 minutes per day.
- The development of positive social skills is a primary objective of the physical activity program.
- Program highlights include daily physical education that provides a physically and psychologically safe learning environment, where inclusion, fair play, fun, and flexibility (i.e., students are offered activity choice) are key elements of the physical activity experience.
- Lack of competence (e.g., physical, social) is not perceived as a bad thing, rather it is positioned as an opportunity to learn. As such, students of all ability levels regularly participate in the gymnasium.
- Evaluation in physical education is based on the student's effort, participation, and attitude towards others.
- Students are allowed to opt into a daily physical activity option class at the end of each day. Participation in this option class is contingent upon appropriate student behavior in the prior physical education and academic classes.
- Students also have the option to join a weekly swim program at a local pool.
- Large group activities, special events (e.g., Friday afternoon school-wide baseball, winter carnival), and a limited range of inter-school activities are offered throughout the school year.
- Daily lunch hour pick-up basketball is organized voluntarily by school and treatment center staff. Other lunch hour activities are organized seasonally (e.g., biking, walking, outdoor hockey).
- Teachers use regular and spontaneous active living breaks to help students perform in the academic classes (e.g., academic teachers will take students to the gym for short periods of time at the end of a class to allow them to actively expend energy and prepare for the next academic task).
- Physical activities are used as a "bridge", allowing new students to integrate into the school/treatment center program, and successful students to re-integrate back into the community school (e.g., through participation on the neighbourhood school's sports' team).

**Program analysis: How physical activities help**

- The quality and quantity of the active living program is considered to help student performance in terms of school attendance, behavior in class, improved student-teacher relationships, ability to focus on academic tasks, ability to integrate socially with peers, and a decrease in conflict issues.
- For Native students, participation in sports acts as a cultural bridge, allowing new arrivals a means to integrate into the foreign/threatening culture of the urban treatment facility through the familiarity, psychological safety, (and acceptance) of cross-cultural games.
- Physical activity allows "play-time for big kids", many of whom have not had the opportunity to experience play, and the developmental benefits of play in their childhood.
- Contextually relevant health benefits of the program include stress release, release of anger, aggression, and tension, relief from boredom.
- Contextually relevant social benefits include the development of appropriate social skills (e.g., cooperation, team-work) and a sense of belonging through the experience and development of social bonds on the playing field (combats loneliness, isolation).
- The contingencies of games (e.g., highly interactive, lots of hands-on practice) allows students the opportunity to experience improvement and success across a variety of skills and activities.
- The experiential nature of the play experience (i.e., involving all the senses) allows students greater control and responsibility over their learning; e.g., the immediacy of performance feedback allows for self-correction (as opposed to correction by a teacher, which can be threatening for some students).
- The structure of games and the public celebration of accomplishment in the gymnasium have potential to positively affect the student's self-esteem.
  *Note*: Academic accomplishment in the classroom did not appear to be celebrated in the same way (e.g., with high fives). Perhaps achievement in the classroom was not as socially-acceptable as on the playing field.
- For students who present as "angry", the gym sometimes allows a transformation of negative energy into more positive energy (e.g., engaging actively with a peer through play) that often carries over into other parts of the school (thus contributing to school performance).
- Overall, physical activities contribute a positive energy to the overall school climate.

## APPENDIX B

### Details of Methods

***The purpose and value of case study research:***

Case study is a form of naturalistic, qualitative research where the objective is to understand the meaning of some bounded phenomenon, which could be a program, person, event, process, or particular group (et cetera), that is studied in "context" (Merriam, 1988). By studying complex social variables in this holistic, process-oriented manner, a rich, holistic description and interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation can be provided. The purposes of this form of research study is to construct new meaning (about a little understood phenomenon), confirm what is known about a phenomenon, or extend the researcher's understanding of the research issue. Case studies might also be used to discover or identify important variables, to generate hypotheses for future research, to explain the forces causing the phenomenon in question, to identify plausible causal networks shaping the phenomenon, and to document the phenomenon of interest.

Case studies are particularly suited to the study of innovative programs or practices, and by being holistic, they can investigate a phenomenon more fully than other forms of research, such as surveys or experimental designs. Case studies can ask unique research questions. They can also be evaluative, and provide description, explanation and judgment. With regard to interpretive accounts, their value is enhanced because they are grounded in real life (which allows, for example, the collection of more *sensual*, as opposed to abstract, information), and the reader's own experiences can be expanded through her or his interaction with the text.

As naturalistic inquiry, fieldwork takes place in the natural setting, and the flexible nature of the research design allows the researcher to adapt to the demands of the environment. This flexibility also enables the research process to search for interpretations that are situation specific. The researcher is allowed to see how partial events relate to the whole, and how non-verbal aspects can contribute to interpretations, can explore anomalous responses, and can generate immediate clarifications and summaries as the study evolves (Guba and Lincoln, as cited in Merriam). The research is grounded in the 'real world' such that our understanding and interpretation of observations of educational phenomenon can lead to significant insight regarding our knowledge base and practice of education (Merriam, 1988). Case study research is often valued for its pragmatic approach, and is arguably more appropriate, useful, and workable than other research designs for a given situation. Given that the postmodern perspective highlights the contingent, local nature of knowledge production by calling for more "local stories" (Usher and Edwards, 1992), case study fits well within this perspective. For these reasons, an interpretive case study was chosen as the research method by which the active living program at the adolescent treatment center/school would be investigated.

***The study participants, ethical review, and participant consent***

Normally, there are 45 registered students (33 who are residents at the treatment center, 12 who are day treatment students, i.e., they live in the community) and twelve staff at the school. Consent forms were administered to all students prior to commencement of the study and followed guidelines established in the Ethics Review(s) carried out with the school division, the treatment center, and the

University of Alberta. In the event that the students were in residential care, consent was requested from a child welfare representative. Teachers (and support staff), child care workers at the treatment center, and some parents/legal guardians were also invited to participate. While each student participant had willingly signed the written consent form, there were some who had tremendous difficulty reading. For all students, I briefly explained the purpose of the study before conducting any interviews. I summarized the study by saying that I wanted to know what the students thought of the physical education and active living program so that I could better understand what young people thought was good and bad and then pass their comments on to others working in similar schools. I also re-emphasized their right to withdraw from the project at any time.

On several occasions, I was approached by students and asked, "Why aren't you talking to me?" When I explained that I hadn't received a signed consent form from their parents or guardians, two students made an extra effort to get their permission slip signed and returned in time for me to add them to the study group. Given the obstacles to receiving informed consent (e.g., 50% of the students do not live in the community, and consent forms often had to be faxed to caseworkers who were either unavailable or overburdened with the demands of their job), I treated the participants as if they were a gold mine, and diligently arranged 'mining expeditions' (i.e., interviews) as soon as they were interested and willing to talk to me. The process of sitting down together was further complicated by the transient attendance patterns of the students at the school. As such, only one of the original six students I interviewed in the first round of inquiry was present in school during the last data

collection period. This is not unusual, as my data collection period extended over a twelve month period.

Although many students at the treatment center/school had been diagnosed with emotional or behavioral *dis*-orders (e.g., attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, fetal alcohol syndrome and effects, oppositional defiant disorder, depression), I did not request access to files containing this information. Given that the nature of the diagnostic process is problematic, yet unproblematically relies upon a normalizing discourse that labels students I did not feel this information was appropriate or necessary to the study. Otherwise, all identifying elements of the interviews, observations, and documents collected were altered so as to protect the anonymity of the participants. While photos and even videotapes might have greatly enhanced the ethnographic data collected for the study, issues of confidentiality took precedence and these sources were also not considered for the data collection.

***Ethical considerations***

Working with troubled youth also involves the challenge of developing trust in situations that may raise ethical dilemmas, (e.g., in the event of a disclosure of abuse, or a conflict, the researcher would need to respond in an ethical manner, see Fine & Sandstrom, 1988). A protocol was discussed with school and treatment center officials prior to commencement of the study in order to ensure that expectations regarding my behavior were clarified with both students and staff. Following on the advice of Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun (1997) with regard to interview ethics in conducting residential school research, I avoided all questions that may have invoked difficult feelings or memories for the students. If a participant volunteered personal

information as part of our conversation, I asked them specifically if it was okay to integrate their comments within the study. Issues of obligation were on-going throughout the study, and as Smits, Friesen, Hicks, and Leroy (1997) suggest, obligation is more experiential than prescriptive in that it involves the intersubjective lived quality of research, the irreducibility of lives, and the nature of responsibility. Interpretive inquiry has been described as a moral act (Heshusius & Ballard, 1996), a way of being, and with each word, image, or metaphor that I would construct as a representation, I was conscious of this challenge. Over the course of the study, I shared my interpretations with students and staff, asking their feedback with regard to how my words resonated with their own understanding of the treatment center and school. Their comments were a critical element of my day-to-day encounter with the research questions.

***Data collection***

The attendance and behavior of troubled students can be quite unpredictable, making it nearly impossible to plan and maintain a detailed schedule of data collection; thus, a naturalistic inquiry suited the demands of the environment. The first entry into the school was a "pilot test" that allowed me to refine the data collection plans with regard to content and procedures (Yin, 1994). During this initial visit which lasted three days, a protocol was discussed with the principal with regard to future contact at the school. At this time, I also conducted interviews with a group of day students, and observed students in their academic and physical education classes, as well as their physical activity options. My experiences during this initial fieldwork

indicated that individual, one-on-one, semi-structured audio taped interviews would be best and that I should be prepared for spontaneity with regard to the interview process.

For the most part, each interview took place on an ad hoc basis at a time in the day when any one of the students (with consent) wanted to talk to me. I tried to make myself available mostly in the mornings for interviews, which freed up the afternoons for observations of the physical education classes. Finding a quiet spot to conduct the interviews was often a challenge, as the school was small and rooms were used maximally. I sometimes felt like the students and I were a jack in the box, constantly surprising apologetic staff members who would unexpectedly trip over our interview site as they conducted their school business. During one interview session, an interview participant and I moved four times before finding a quiet, secluded area to use. My past experience at the school helped me adapt to these kinds of day to day goings-on. Perhaps my biggest challenge was figuring out how to avoid *being volunteered* to look after various kids throughout the day, a "responsibility of intervention" I openly welcomed as part of the research exchange (Hermes, 1998; Newkirk, 1996).

***Developing rapport***

Reciprocity and respect are important factors in developing rapport (Denis, 1997; Hermes, 1998). I have always worked toward developing a genuinely respectful (and reciprocal) relationship with my students, a practice that I tried to maintain throughout the data collection period. Students who attend this treatment center habitually encounter many adults in their day to day life. From therapists, to clinicians, to parole officers, to social workers, to volunteers, they have had much

experience interacting with professionals and other care-givers. I firmly believe that their experiences teach them well to distinguish between those who are sincere and respectful, and those who are less worthy of their trust (i.e., you can't bullshit them, so be yourself, see Schultz, 1997).

Of note, my prior involvement at the school helped me to establish a "respectful" identity within the school. Former students knew who I was, and my relationship with them eased my way into the school. Consequently, I was able to develop a fairly comfortable rapport with many of the new students/participants early on in the study. It also helped that I had spent many hours in the past trying to ascertain what "cool" meant within a student discourse at that particular school; this type of knowledge can be particularly helpful in field settings (see Schultz, 1997). I quite like the young people at the treatment center, and I had tremendous faith in their ability to determine the characteristics of a respectful, authentic relationship. With regard to reciprocity, I think it is worth noting that the second quickest way to garner an interview was to offer to conduct the interview in the gym (the quickest way has been to arrange an interview during the student's least favourite class).

As a rule, I feel I was able to establish a comfortable relationship quicker when I took the time to *hang* a little with the student prior to an interview. This would involve shooting hoops, playing pool, going for a walk, or just sitting with a group of students in a class before moving on to the interview itself. When I'd remember, I'd buy the participants a coke (or lunch) after or before an interview. These perks didn't seem to be a big deal for the students, although the attention they received during the interview did seem to impress them, especially at the start.

In a few cases, the interview would stagger to a stuttering halt of "I don't knows" as we both, novice interviewer and restless interviewee, ran out of things to say. As the students and I struggled to find a shared language to express our thoughts and feelings, it became more obvious to me how our day to day vocabulary is not well equipped to capture in language the experiential nature of the physical activity experience. Some of the best interviews took place in the gym, which provided a natural setting from which to reference the questions. On one memorable occasion, a particularly *hyper* young man provided an experientially meaningful interview as I conversed with him between shots at the basket. Watching his body movements and gestures, focus of attention, and vocal reactions to each missed shot or swoosh of the ball spoke more about the phenomenon in question than any words could have expressed. The hermeneutic process of going back and forth to the research site allowed the opportunity to work through some of the more problematic issues that arose with regard to my understanding of the emerging student discourse around the physical activity experience. In appendix C, I outline in more detail the various stages of data collection and analysis that helped inform the interpretations I have constructed in this study.

In total, I conducted 35 student interviews with 23 youth participants, and 19 adult interviews with the predominantly whitestream treatment center staff, school staff, an Aboriginal foster parent, and an Aboriginal Outreach Worker who had formerly attended a residential school where he had been introduced to a number of sports and physical activities.

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## APPENDIX C

### Interpretive Inquiry: Stages in the Hermeneutic Spiral

**Research project:** An interpretive case study of an active living program at an adolescent treatment center school.

**First loop:** Pilot study with six day students, interviews and observations, (3 days on site);
Preliminary between group analysis of interview transcripts;
Development of emerging themes (composite view);
Written report: *"The benefits of active living for youth at risk: Preliminary thoughts from a phenomenological perspective…"* presented at national (CAHPERD/HPEC Conference, May, '97); *"It's good for my head" and other personal benefits of active living according to kids at risk.* (Wellspring Journal, September, '97). Revised version of the CAHPERD/HPEC paper published (with permission) in the Alberta Runner Magazine, *(Halas, J. & Watkinson, J. (1999). "Everyone gets a chance": a group of "at risk" students describe what's it like at their "active living" school. Runner, 37 (1), 14-22.)*

**Second loop:** Repetition of initial entry questions (using modified interview protocol to include questions regarding hope) with seven residential students and three day students; discussion of initial themes, (seven days on site);
Follow-up discussion of emergent themes with two day students from pilot;
All participants complete the Children's Hope Scale (Snyder);
Observation of the physical education and lunch hour activities;
Collection of school documents; field notes; personal journal;
Teacher/staff interviews (including focus groups and informal conversations);
Transcription of all tapes; read for meaning (between group analysis); Within group analysis of one participant;
Poster presentation *"Keeps me active, … keeps me going": An Aboriginal youth reflects upon his physical activity experiences at an Adolescent Treatment Center School* (Health Promotion Summer Institute, Nechi Institute);
Preliminary paper prepared for and submitted to Edel 561 (analysis of themes pertaining to a description of the school program and interpretation of the students' experiences of the program); themes presented at the Faculty Research Day.

**Third loop:**

Follow-up questions incorporating a narrative interview protocol (see Ellis, 1998) with five participants, two from the original pilot study; (2 days on site);
Observation of classrooms, lunch hour basketball and outdoor physical education classes;
Collection of school documents; follow-up interviews with staff; field notes;
Preliminary analysis of a segment of one transcript…presented in Edel 561;
Preliminary analysis of the experience of anger for high risk students…presented in Self-regulation seminar;
Transcribe recent interviews;
*The Fun-omenology of Physical Activity for Youth at Risk: A Case study;* paper presented at the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability Conference, Victoria, BC, where it was awarded the Dr. Ted Wall Graduate Research Award.

**Narrative Portrait:**

*The way Joe gets to school...* Short cluster of emerging themes from one case study presented in a descriptive context of the school program; Class presentation, Edel 561.

**Fourth loop:**

Revision of questions to focus upon issues pertinent to Native students (as per CFLRI grant); follow-up interviews with five students (focus upon questions of fun, anger, arrival at the school, perceptions of differences between the class and the gym); initial interviews with ten new students, including three students from the new off-site schooling program; observation of off-site program, lunch hour activities, physical education classes, physical activity option classes, swim program, classroom activities; cultural activities (with Aboriginal culture coordinator) collection of documents (attendance records); Interview with language arts teacher, Native foster parent.

**Fifth loop:**

Continuation of questions and issues from fourth loop (i.e., on site data collection during two school periods in one month);
Interviews with remaining group of students;
Participation in sweat ceremony;
Follow-up questions;
Member checking first series of themes to look for consistency in how students interpret the program over time;
Interview with new physical education teacher.

**Sixth loop:**

Continued data analysis and preparation of individual student profiles, common and unexpected themes, and interpretive drafts;
Sharing of ideas with my dissertation committee, a dissertation support group (interested colleagues), and a very clever group of significant *others* (i.e., a diverse group of people *outside* of the study who read through selected transcripts and written drafts of work and provided their own interpretive feedback: this group included two friends, one Native and one who was a self-described "non-phys' ed'er");
Interview and sharing of interpretations with a Native Outreach Worker who had formerly attended a residential school, and now works with inner-city Native youth;
Preparation of final thesis document.

## APPENDIX D

### Sample interview questions:

**Stage 1: Building rapport**
How is school going this year? Who are you hanging out with?
What's the best part of school, ... physical education? The worst part...?

**Stage 2: Experiencing the active living program**
Describe for me the perfect physical education class... What makes it good?
Describe for me a bad phys. ed. class… What makes it bad?
What does your body feel like when you're finished (e.g., do you like sweating/ tired muscles)?
Do you think everyone plays fairly? What happens when they don't?
What makes a game/activity really fun?

**Stage 3: Physical activity in day to day life**
A few years ago, students at Macdonald only had phys. ed. two or three times a week. Now you have it every day...why do you think the time has been increased?
When you wake up in the morning of a school day, what images do you have in your mind? If it is a special phys. ed. day, how do you feel about coming to school?

### Sample narrative questions

**Follow up questions on anger:**

Lots of kids mentioned that the gym helps them with their anger. Can you give me an example of what they might be talking about? (Of how the gym helps them?)

When you hear the word anger, what do you think about?

Can you tell me about a time that you were really angry? How did that situation resolve itself?

How good is the school at helping kids deal with their anger? Can you describe to me a situation where someone at the school helped someone with their anger?

**Follow up questions on personal safety:**

Students have said, and I've seen, that the gym can be a place with lots of emotion, and kids do get aggressive, and all hyper…sometimes fights break out. Is that a scary thing for kids to see? How safe do they feel in the gym here? How about at lunch time? At swimming? In phys. ed. options?
What do teachers do to make the gym a safe place?
Can you give me an example of when the gym was not a safe place?
How about the classrooms, are they safe places to be?

## APPENDIX E

### Sample transcript

*Okay, I'm going to move to some questions about anger. Like how do you describe anger?*

Uhhh. People trying to express feelings that they don't understand.

*Now, um, you talked about how for people, for a lot of guys, going to the gym is a good release of their anger* (yeah), *can you think of a time, a specific time when that happened for you?*

Yeah, I can. There was a time that I was uh, … going downstairs to play basketball, and there was this guy bugging me, really badly. And I go, "okay, we'll play a game and if, if I win, we'll be friends, if we don't, we'll still be friends but, we'll be all mad at each other" and then it sorta' turned into fun, it "ah right on, good game" (emphasis) I kinda' started it off like, talking to my enemy, "ahh right on, good game", and so, by the end of that game, we were talking and having fun. So, that's a way…(?, words muddled on tape)

*For you, what are things that make you angry?*

Uh, I can't really see myself being angry anymore, like, sometimes I get angry, but it really releases quickly, so…it's hard to say, cause I won't ever be angry at anyone, I'm upset, annoyed, but I can't find myself being angry and stomping away.

*Did you used to be angry?*

I used to be a lot angry…like, I don't know. It's kind of funny, and, everything's falling in place, and I don't really have the big problems I used to, with other kids.

*Well, for some of the kids who do get angry, and you were talking before about your definition of anger, do you think...like dealing with your anger, is that expressing your anger? Like I'm trying to find a way of looking at it...*

It's expressing different feelings about … what you think about other people. "Oh I hate you", you're really mad at him, so…

*Okay, well, picture yourself down in the gym now. Would you describe the gym as a place with a positive energy, a negative energy or a neutral energy? Or, how would you describe it?*

Uh, negative and positive. Like you can go down there and just have plain fun, and then you can go down there, be angry, and then get rid of your angry. Like, I've done that so many times, "ah, I'm pissed off" and I'll like, "okay, I'll be with these guys"

and then I end up having fun. I'll go out the gym all happy and "oh right on, I won". Being buddies with everyone. When I went down there all angry, just like with everyone that I've seen, and I go up there … happy, so.

*So, that's what I was trying to get at, a circle there. So you go in there…*(yeah), *and you're, you're angry, but you release it…*

…and then you come out happy…

*…in a positive way,* (we're both talking at the same time*), yeah, you come out happy. Right on. Okay, uh. Like the word energy, is energy a good way to describe like, emotions?*

(pause)

*Or what do you think of …* (yeah) … *when you hear energy?*

It is… a way of releasing…anger (intonation). Like if you have energy, then you're going to go out and play mad, but you're not going to stay mad forever and you'll end up giving that energy away to good energy. So…

*What about energy between people? How does that work?*

Like friction?

*Yeah. Yeah, that's one way of looking at it. Like, can you tell me, how would you describe, for the most part, the energy that your teachers bring to school? Is it positive? Is it negative?*

It's positive, like, sometimes the way kids look at it, it's negative, but it's really positive, so they're (tape problems????) … It's kind of confusing.

*Cause another question I have is how good is the school at helping kids deal with their anger?*

Okay. It's real good cause you got a resource room. And if you got two people friction, fighting and all that, and swearing at each other, they go downstairs into Bill's room, and then you … talk it out, and you cannot leave that room until you agree to what the problems are, what you're going to do resolve it, and, if you're gonna' stay enemies or be friends, (yeah) maybe go up into the class and it's okay. But some, … that's the way that works out, but some people don't always do that, so.

*Oh yeah, some kids said that teacher's energy is negative. Is that what you said?* (yeah) *Teacher's are positive, you said, but some kids would see it as …*

Negative. That's why some kids hate the teachers.